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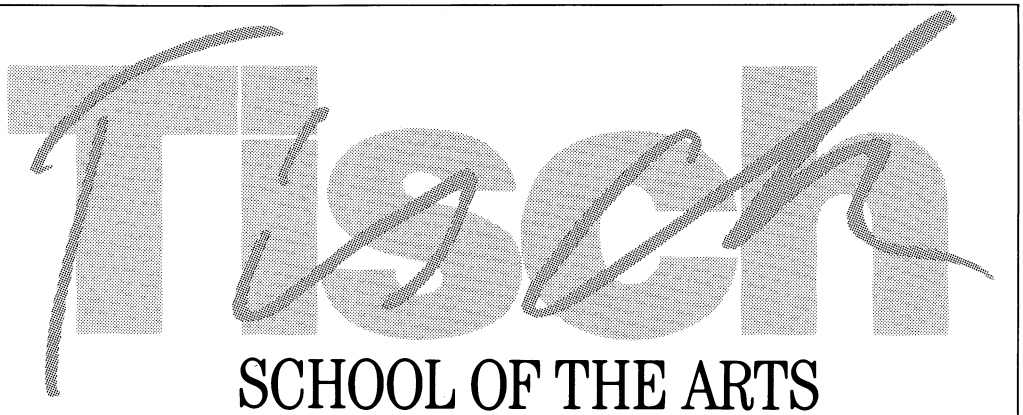

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Wim and His Wings

IRA PANETH

From the early close-up of an eye to the closing dedication to "all the angels," and particularly Yasujiro Ozu, François Truffaut, and Andrei Tarkovsky, Wim Wenders's *Wings of Desire* (*Der Himmel über Berlin*) represents a watershed for the prolific, 43-year-old, West German director. His latest movie soars with the energy of a take-off into new territory, though perhaps like all true steps forward it also marks a movement backward. *Wings of Desire* is Wenders's first film since *The American Friend* (1977) to be made and set in West Germany and in primarily the German language. It also marks his physical return to West Berlin after eight years of living in the United States, with four films made there: *Lightning Over Water* (1980), *Hammett* (1982), *The State of Things* (1982), and *Paris, Texas* (1984).

Wings of Desire, co-written with Austrian author Peter Handke,has won numerous awards including Best Director at Cannes. It begins as a tale focusing on two angels, Damiel and Cassiel (the brighter-eyed Bruno Ganz and the more sober Otto Sander), who live in an angel's group house in the Berlin library. Wandering the library, subways, apartment buildings, and streets of the city—their presence unseen except by children, though occasionally felt by sensitive adults—they note the actions and listen to the thoughts, dreams, fears, and hopes of people, which are rendered in a highly original kind of almost psychoanalytic free stream of consciousness, full of anxiety, pain, tenderness, hope.

The angels' abilities to read minds and to pass through physical barriers provides an opportunity for Wenders to portray Berlin as a marvelous panorama of images, sounds, associations. Of Berlin, Wenders said that the movie "could take place nowhere else," continuing, "It is only in Berlin that I could recognize what it means to be German . . . for history is both physically and emotionally present . . . No other city is to such an extent a symbol, a place of survival. It is a site, more than a city." The film explores this wideranging significance: Berlin as a symbol of the post-World War II world order, of borders, no-man's land, desire, and, most of all, of German history and Nazism. In *Kings of the Road* (1976) and *Wrong Move* (1975), Wenders touched upon these subjects, but here he engages them more directly, though retaining a certain obliqueness, weaving a multi-layered pattern befitting the complexity of the past. Cassiel listens to an old writer (played by Curt Bois, an actor who worked with Max Reinhardt and Bertolt Brecht and fled Nazi Germany in 1933) whose memory is enmeshed with Nazi Germany, who wonders why no one sings an epic of peace, announces that his heroes are no longer kings and warriors, ponders the connections between the storyteller and his listeners, and worries about humankind losing its childhood. As part of Bois and the angel's memories, old newsreel footage of wartorn Berlin and Nazism is included in the movie.

Another strand is a film-within-the-film, with Peter Falk as himself in Berlin to make a detective movie set in Nazi Germany. Damiel follows him to the set where extras wear yellow stars and SS uniforms. Falk thinks about the question of "extra human beings" and why the Nazis chose the color yellow. Damiel and Falk drum up a friendship of sorts, and Falk turns out to have once been an angel, who tries to entice angels to come shake his hand.

There is also the Wall, which the film continually runs up against, where in the Wall's no-man's land Damiel and Cassiel walk to get away from it all, and where Damiel wakes up as a human being—having chosen to taste a steaming cup of coffee and feel the feel of cold hands over eternity and truth.

There is also a woman in the story. Damiel has gradually fallen in love with a trapeze artist (Solveig Dommartin in her film debut) he stumbled on at the Alekan Circus (named after the film's cinematographer, Henri Alekan, who shot Jean Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*). Captivated by Marion, Damiel goes with her from the circus tent to her trailer, watches her last night's performance, trails her to a club where she dances alone. All the time he watches her and listens to her stream of consciousness about her fear of her final performance, her

The angel Damiel (Bruno Ganz) on a statue high above Berlin: WINGS OF DESIRE

yearning for "a wave of love that would stir in me," her past story.

Paris, Texas explored the damage that occurred when a man refused to recognize the subjectivity of the woman he desired, when she was only an object of his fantasy and imagination; it culminated in the peepshow-booth scene with a deconstruction of this romantic language of men and women. *Wings of Desire* in a certain sense picks up here, presenting an alternative, more hopeful, but equally complex portrayal of male desire and female subjectivity. While Marion is the object of Damiel's gaze and desire, the possibilities in film language are used to transcend this framework. We see her objectively and in scenes without his presence. And even when Damiel is watching her, Marion's existence in/on her own terms comes through—for instance, in the sensuous and charged rock club scene. And at the end, when they finally meet, it is she who looks at him, sitting at the bar, back turned to both her and the camera. It is she who speaks into the camera a monologue that evoked in me Rainer Maria Rilke's words that love "is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks, . . . the work for which all other work is but preparation." (Rilke, it turns out, was one of Wenders's inspirations for the film.)

Until recently, Wenders said, "I never had the courage to dare tell a love story." *Wings of Desire*, which ends, "We have embarked . . . to be continued," promises that "the love story has just begun," and so we have much to look forward to.

•

What accounted for the untypical length of time for you, three years, between Paris, Texas *and* Wings of Desire*?*

Two things. I felt that I should take a long break because I had been working a lot. I felt that I had really achieved something with *Paris, Texas*, and for the first time I also felt it had created expectations everywhere, and I felt if you try to live up to them, it's probably the worst thing you can do. I thought, you'd better think twice before you make your next film.

I worked on a film (the forthcoming *Till the End of the World*) for two years, wrote, prepared and travelled. We [Wenders and Solveig Dommartin] went twice around the world. It was obvious that this film was going to take at least another year or two until we could do it—it's very big. So I told Solveig that it was now three years since I had shot. I had not been behind the camera. I said we're gonna put that on hold and do something else real fast and spontaneously, and we're gonna do it in Berlin because that's where we were at the time. I felt that I still had the energy of somebody who had been away and was still looking with a lot of curiosity and I wanted to keep that. Three months later we made *Wings of Desire*.

You've called yourself a "self-confessed pessimist," but after seeing Wings of Desire *it*

seems that this could not be true anymore.

It certainly is not true anymore. No. In a way *Paris, Texas* is to blame for this change of attitude. Like I wanted to find out what would happen if you used optimism almost like a device, a structural device, almost just as a method, and the most amazing thing happened: the method became much more than a method, than a way to get somewhere. It changed me entirely, more than just a different way to look at things. I think that the effect of *Wings of Desire* is entirely optimistic, although it shows quite a lot of grim sides of life. It was something that was not just in the script, it was part of me.

Did that feeling grow as you made the film?

It was there from the beginning, but it was confirmed. One would not know if one could keep it up during a whole film, if this optimism would carry the whole film, especially the way I was shooting: in chronological order and always ready to change everything if it felt like it.

One of the things that struck me about Wings of Desire *was it seemed to be for peace in very concrete ways and instances. Did you have that in mind when you started or did it just happen?*

I had that in mind and in a way it came with the very first idea to make a movie in Berlin. I knew, before I even knew the story, that it was going to take place in Berlin and the city of Berlin carries the idea of peace very powerfully. It needs it more than other cities and also the desire for it is stronger than in other cities. Just as the freedom of the city is limited and its sense of freedom is more intense and almost unlimited. It is an extremely tolerant city. The peace movement in Germany started in Berlin and that's no coincidence.

How did it feel to make a movie without the imprint of America all over it?

It was really like coming home. It was like I had told this one story, this one big story, over and over again in twelve films, and this one, the thirteenth, was my second first film—I was having a new start. It was a coincidence, but then again it probably was not, that I made my very first feature film, called *Summer in the City*, in 1969 in Berlin, and my second first film, twenty years later, again in Berlin. So there's almost a logic to it, although it was certainly not planned. *Summer in the City* was the story of a guy who comes out of prison in Munich and goes to Berlin. He wants to see his friends to reconnect and he does not, really, and at the end he leaves—he's going to New York. There I was twenty years later coming back from New York. It was a strange feeling and in a way all these films in between have been heavily impregnated with America, first with an image of America, and then I made four in a row in English and in America. I had very light luggage, so to speak, when I started *Wings of Desire*. It was as if the heavy luggage I had been carrying all the time was now finally in some storage space in New York.

What meaning does America have for you? What sort of terms have you come to with it?

It's so difficult to define that because it's almost as if the very word America was difficult to define. It's like everybody has America in their head so it's almost this imaginary country that really consists of the notions of each and everybody. And, of course, it was an imaginary country in my mind when I grew up and it still is, although I lived there for almost eight years and I feel I got to know some of it. It's a dream country. This dream was started in the nineteenth century when America meant this mythical place that you could go if you couldn't fulfill your own dreams wherever you lived, or live out whatever religion or profession or passion you had. Some of this I think is still alive, and in a strange way much more alive, it feels to me, outside of America than inside. Inside, I think a lot of people have stopped dreaming of their country this way, and it seems to me also that the American dream has been so much exploited inside the United States through an exploitation of the image of it in American movies, and television, that the American dream is almost like a Marlboro dream now. It is almost hollow and it does not mean anything anymore. So it seems it is again something that is projected into America from outside.

Why was the title changed from Heavens Over Berlin *to* Wings of Desire*?*

I did not feel it worked in English or French. In German the word *Himmel* means both sky and heavens so it was almost like a little poem, a litle haiku. In French or English *The Sky Over Berlin* sounded like a war movie and *Heavens Over Berlin* was too romantic. I tried to look for a title that was also a little poetic in French and English and that would translate another part of the movie. Then *Wings of Desire* or *Les Ailes du Desir* seemed to work real well. I tried to retranslate this into German because I would have liked to have just one title, but there is no word in German for desire. There is just none.

It's terrible. There are all sorts of words that are either way too explicitly sexual or way too general. So I kept two titles.

In the film you open up a lot of space for portraying women and desire in film. While Marion is Damiel's, and the viewer's, object of desire and imagination one feels her subjectivity powerfully and overwhelmingly. This is not usual or conventional. How did Marion's portrayal develop?

In a way she is the leading character, as she is the only human being in it from the beginning. I thought it would be fatal for the film if she had been the object of his desire, I thought that she really had to be the subject of the film very much. So in a lot of the scenes she's really the center and not so much his object. She's very much alive. I knew it was going to be a love story from the beginning—that was my desire—and I thought if she was the object of his desire then we'd miss the whole point. As Solveig and I had been working for two years on a film where the woman is the central character and the whole thing is seen from her point of view, it was not such a big effort, it came almost logically and naturally that she's very important in the film and somehow even sometimes the voice of the film. And certainly in the very end she's summing up. I mean the climax of the whole film is when she meets the guy and she talks to him.

Her voice-over seemed to be key in expressing her point of view and subjectivity.

Yeah.

I read a review that called the end baldly romantic, but I thought not. When Marion and Damiel's getting together switched from being fate or destiny to being a choice (Marion says this is a decision), I felt it wasn't a traditionally romantic conclusion to a love story.

In a way it is the opposite of romance, to say whatever happens and the love that could happen between the two of us, these are my conditions, and I want it to be a choice, and I don't want to feel it was an accident. In a way the situation is very romantic, and then what she says is almost hard, there's even a certain brutality to it, and a great clarity. It's both. It's very romantic in the sense that it wants and needs and depends on a big love, and, on the other side, it says that it should not be pure emotion but also a choice, and not only of emotions, but of will and of knowledge.

Your films at times have seemed to me not to be just about emotions, but to be emotions, at points to embody those emotions. I think one way to describe what I'm getting at is to compare them to a Mark Rothko painting. And I was wondering if Rothko or other abstract painters have had some sort of influence on you.

The angel Cassiel (Otto Sander, left) listens to the thoughts of Homer, the aging writer (Curt Bois).

Very much so, and the Rothko Chapel in Houston is one of my favorite places on this planet. You have to go there if you like him. You can get a lot of peace and strength from standing in front of his paintings for a long time.

Making Wings of Desire, *did you invent as you went along as you like to do?*

More than ever before. I was not all that conscious of it in the preparation, but as soon as we started shooting it became obvious how vast the possibilites of innovation were because of the invention of the guardian angel and the point of view it implied. So the shooting was very exciting. The camera being the eye of the angel was something altogether new for me, we could not really rely on anything we knew before. Every day we had to come up with new solutions. It felt like a first movie.

Visually the film is stunning, and I mean by this that it has a spaciousness and movement or motion to it that is different, rare in motion pictures. How did you work this out? Did you do a lot of shooting and edit it down?

The problem of the film, if you can call it a problem, from the beginning was there were way too many ideas. Usually you're looking for

ideas in a movie, you need them. This time the problem was to eliminate them. We shot way too much, a lot didn't end up in the movie. It was just endless what you could come up with because of the angels idea. The first version was five hours long.

We did shoot a lot of things in long takes. There was a lot of movement done in the camera and through camera movement, and not so much through editing. We didn't shoot as much as in *Paris, Texas* or *Hammett*, where we did more takes. We didn't have to do a lot over. Of course there are scenes that are rather intensive and that needed some sort of coverage, but even the coverage we did was not like the usual, where you do scenes from different points of view, more or less all over. Very often the choices of the point of view were made so the editing was really done before we shot, and we made some risky decisions—that a scene would only be covered from one point of view, and the continuation would be another point of view, and there was no overlapping footage. But it seemed right to take a lot of risks.

There were several things in Wings of Desire *that seemed to indicate a nostalgia for storytelling: the line about the singer abandoned by mortal listeners and the link drawn between storytelling and childhood, among others. Is that something you feel?*

It's not really nostalgia, [storytelling] is almost this new discovery for me. It is one of the most reassuring things. It seems its very basis is that it reassures you that there is a sense to things. Like the fact that children want to hear stories when they go to sleep. I mean not so much that they want to know this or that, but that they want it as it gives them a security. The story creates a form and the form reassures them so that you can almost tell them any story—which you can actually do. So there is something very powerful in stories, something that gives you security and a sense of identity and meaning. And it seems to me that this sort of storytelling is disappearing a little bit. Because more and more we seem to be getting them from television and movies, and less and less through books. We're confronted with all these films and images and all that, so it seems that storytelling in that old sense, it's not becoming a lost art, but it's getting less important. And the stories we're being fed with mostly in television and film seem just to pretend being stories. Very often they try to act as if they were stories and are really just pure form, and behind there is just a lot of baloney and noise, especially in most of the films made for young people today that only seem to work if there's a lot of action and violence. That has almost replaced an old story structure, so in that sense you're right there is a nostalgia for stories, for real stories and for an epic feeling of a story.

I thought the handwriting at the beginning and the end and the library were wonderful gestures towards the written word.

Yeah. When we were looking for a place in the city where the angels would live, would be at home, we looked for some time. Since angels are not really linked between people and God anymore we could not do a church, so we tried for another place. Then I remembered the ending of one of my favorite films, Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451*, which is in this big open space, and there are all these people and everybody represents a book that they have learned by heart because books are persecuted and burned; and to me that was really a vision of paradise, with all these people walking around and sitting on benches in the park. I thought this is a heavenly place, a library, and then we found this big public library in Berlin, and it's really a wonderful place, with a lot of light, and built with a lot of respect for reading and books, and also so peaceful and quiet. There is also the whole memory and knowledge of mankind united there.

Have you found yourself encountering problems in terms of telling stories in film, since that became a focus of yours relatively recently?

No. I believe very much in form of course, but also the form only seems to work if behind it there is a certain belief, so that the form is not just a hollow thing that you hope will do the job, but that the form has a certain necessity. So the problem is really to believe in the story. And then, of course, you have to believe in form too, because you can have a beautiful story to tell, but if you don't have the form to tell it with, it becomes also strangely meaningless.

You haven't encountered problems with narrative?

Well, this one is not really representative because it is narrative in so many ways. And through the invention of the angel, and the fact that they can witness so much, that they can

The angel Damiel watches Marion (Solveig Dommartin), the trapeze artist: WINGS OF DESIRE

even listen to people's thoughts, so that you'd instantly be much more familiar than usual with every person since you could hear what he or she thinks. So there was a whole new range of entering into people's heads and into many different stories all the time. It was not really typical.

How do you conceive of the spectator and audience that you are making films for?

I think I conceive of them as very important creative collaborators. And I have to explain that. If I look at the films I really like most, and if I look at myself as a spectator of other films, then I clearly favor movies that let me discover them. There is that sort of movie where you feel excited from the beginning because you realize that it is because you look at it that the movie really exists, and because you can put some strings together, and it is open to a lot of interpretation, and you have to sort of put in your own experiences or associations in order to make it work. I really don't like so much the sort of movie where it's all spread out and you really just sit there and it's poured over you and you have no choice: you see what they want you to see. I prefer movies that ask me to see. So in a way I'm trying to do the sort of movies that are for people that I presume to be like myself with other directors' movies. And as I travel a lot with my films and see them with different audiences in different countries, it's really amazing how much a film can change, and how much even between two audiences in the same country; although I know it, I will see a different film.

Do you feel part of any group of directors working in cinema today, or do you feel pretty solitary in what you are doing?

I don't feel that solitary, the opposite really. I feel that there is a network of people who care about films, independent people mostly, and that there are a lot of people in quite a lot of countries and I'm anxious to see their next films. I feel that there are links and that we're working on something common and there is something like a language that a lot of people work on.

Now that you're no longer a young director, who among young film-makers do you think is doing interesting and different things?

Well, Jim Jarmusch is a close friend of mine and I think the three feature films that he has done show an enormous talent and visual mind, and if you see them in a row they also show an enormous learning process. There are young directors all over. I coproduced two films that will come out this summer in Europe. One is a Turkish film, a first feature by a guy called Livanelli, and it is a beautiful and incredible first film. And my assistant on the last few films, Claire Denis, her first feature is called *Chocolate*.

How are you negotiating between your status as an independent personal film-maker and the

drive to be more popular or commercial?

I don't think I made in the course of my films any compromise in the direction of any commercial decision or popular decision. I feel as I look back from one film to another there was something I learned and something that came out of the films. And the fact that *Paris, Texas* suddenly became a popular film, especially in Europe, and that it did not cut me off from the audiences I had before, but that they went along with it, and that all of a sudden the old films found the audience they had not had before, I thought the best way is to work for the people you know and the friends you have because they really represent the audience in such a better way than statistics and box-office numbers.

With the success of Paris, Texas *and now* Wings of Desire *everywhere it has played, have you reached the point in your film-making where you can raise the money as it needs to be raised?*

Wings of Desire was the easiest film ever to put together, and that was certainly due to *Paris, Texas*. From the moment that I put the first two pages of a synopsis on paper till the first day of shooting was three months and it was not a problem to find the money. The film was not expensive by American standards, $3 to $3-1/2 million, but it is a medium-sized budget in Europe and a few years ago I would have had to fight for that and work on it. In a way I think I am in a rather privileged situation right now. That's why I also started to, not produce, but help other people and coproduce; since I have this company, I thought I could also put it to work for other people.

What do you think the future of the movies is? Do you think new waves are played out? Do you think national cinemas still count, or has cinema become something overwhelmingly international?

It's already overwhelmingly international—even in Europe you almost can't make a film anymore if it comes out of one country, you almost necessarily conceive of a coproduction. I think this is a good thing. On the other hand, I think it's fatal if a film does not carry any identity anymore other than the color of the money. I think one has to combine both, collaborate on the international levels, especially among independents, and also make sure the film keeps some local color, its own language of some sort.

And the future of the movies, as you asked in Chambre 666*?*

I guess it is inevitable, since it is a nineteenth-century invention from the mechanical age, that towards the end of the century film is going to be replaced entirely by electronic and digital means. The electronic images I've seen are not digital quality yet, but that will soon follow, on a big screen. It really did not look worse than an average theater projection on 35 millimeter, considering the average screening would not be altogether focused, would be a little sloppy. The electronic image could almost compete with that—though of course not if there was a good screen and print. The electronic image is so much more convenient and the digital information is so superior because you don't lose a generation, it does not break or scratch. Eventually I think it will replace film, and of course a whole different language will come with it, a whole different aesthetics, and also whole different sets of stories.

Do you feel there will be good possibilities for interesting artistic works to come out of it?

I think so. On the other hand, the means of production might be even more centralized because in order to do a production you need a lot of technology. In film, with a little money, you rent a camera and you can make a movie, but with a digital or electronic production a bigger apparatus is needed and there's going to be more control. But I also think, because this looks like the last leg of movies as we know it and of traditional film language, there is going to be a lot of freedom in this last leg and there might be an exciting period for film-making ahead, like a real blazing finish.

What about your future? When do you go into production on Till the End of the World*? What's a little background on it?*

We are in preproduction and we will be for the next twelve months. We will start shooting in April of next year and we'll shoot until the end of the year. It will be a very long shoot, through six continents. I think the film will probably be ready in the summer of 1990, it might come out in fall or winter. The story starts in 1998 and ends in the year 2003, so it will be a science-fiction movie, but not altogether, as it won't be all that much into a science-fiction world. It will deal with our fears and hopes for the future, and, of course, it will be the love story that *Wings of Desire* promises to be in the end.

GAYLYN STUDLAR AND DAVID DESSER

Never Having to Say You're Sorry: *Rambo's* Rewriting of the Vietnam War

Cultural Trauma and "The Will to Myth"

"History is what hurts," writes Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious,* "It is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis." (102) The pain of history, its delimiting effect on action, is often seen as a political, a cultural, a national liability. Therefore, contemporary history has been the subject of an ideological battle which seeks to rewrite, to rehabilitate, controversial and ambiguous events through the use of symbols. One arena of on-going cultural concern in the United States is our involvement in Vietnam. It seems clear that reconstituting an image —a "memory"—of Vietnam under the impetus of Reaganism appears to fulfill a specific ideological mission. Yet the complexity of this reconstitution or rewriting has not been fully realized, either in film studies or in political discourse. Neither has the manner in which the Reaganite right coopted often contradictory and competing discourses surrounding the rehabilitation of Vietnam been adequately addressed. A string of "rightwing" Vietnam films has been much discussed, but their reliance on the specific mechanism of *displacement* to achieve a symbolic or mythic reworking of the war has not been recognized. Also insufficiently acknowledged is the fact that, far from being a unique occurrence, the current attempt to rewrite Vietnam, and the era of the 1960s more broadly, follows a well-established pattern of reworking the past in postwar Japan and Germany. Although it would be naive to advance a simple parallelist conception of history that foregrounds obvious analogies at the expense of important historical differences, the rewriting of the Vietnam war evidences a real, if complicated, link to previous situations where nations have moved beyond revising history to rewriting it through specific cultural processes.

That America's "rewriting" of the Vietnam war is ideological in nature, of a particular political postwar moment, is clear *a priori.* But the site at which it is occurring is perhaps less clear and therefore more significant. For what is being rewritten might justifiably be called a "trauma," a shock to the cultural system. Commonly used phrases such as "healing the wounds of Vietnam" are quite revelatory of this idea, but do not grasp the difficulty of any cultural recuperation from shock. In reality, the attempt to cope with the national trauma of Vietnam confronts less a physical than a psychic trauma. The mechanisms through which healing can occur, therefore, are more devious, more in need, if you will, of "analysis."

The central question in the problem of the Vietnam war in history is: How can the US deal with not only its defeat in Vietnam, but with the fact that it never should have been there in the first place? By answering this question, the United States would confront the potentially painful revelations of its involvement in Vietnam, which is reminiscent of those questions faced by other nations: How can Japan cope with its role in the Pacific aggression of WW II? How can the West Germans resolve the Nazi era? These questions are virtually unanswerable without admission of guilt. But if, as Freud maintained, individuals find guilt intolerable and attempt to repress it, why should cultures be any different? ("Repression" 112) And if guilt, in spite of repression, always finds an unconscious avenue of expression in the individual's life, we must similarly mark a return of the repressed in cultural discourse as well.

In one respect, the return of the repressed explains the number of Vietnam films appearing simultaneously, or at least in waves of films during the 1980s. Given the nature of film production, the box-office success of any individual film cannot account for so many Vietnam

films appearing within a short period of time. Nor can the popularity of such films, left and right, automatically be taken as an indicator of psychic healing. On the contrary, their coexistence might be read as a register of the nation's ambivalent feelings over the war, and ambivalence, Freud tells us, is one of the necessary ingredients in the creation of guilt feelings. ("Repression" 114–5)

Psychoanalytic therapy maintains that to be healed, one must recall the memory of the trauma which has been repressed by a sense of guilt. Otherwise, a "faulty" memory or outright amnesia covers the truth, which lies somewhere deep in the unconscious. The more recent the trauma, the more quickly the memory can be recalled; the more severe the original trauma, the more deeply the memory is buried, the more completely it is repressed. In this respect, cultures can be said to act like individuals—they simply cannot live with overwhelming guilt. Like individual trauma, cultural trauma must be "forgotten," but the guilt of such traumas continues to grow. However, as Freud notes, the mechanism of repression is inevitably flawed: the obstinately repressed material ultimately breaks through and manifests itself in unwelcome symptoms. (112–3) In 1959 Theodor Adorno, calling upon the psychoanalytic explanation of psychic trauma in his discussion of postwar Germany, observed that the psychological damage of a repressed collective past often emerges through dangerous political gestures: defensive overreaction to situations that do not really constitute attacks, "lack of affect" in response to serious issues, and repression of "what was known or half-known." (Adorno 116) Popular discourse often equates forgetting the past with mastering it, says Adorno, but an unmastered past cannot remain safely buried: the mechanisms of repression will bring it into the present in a form which may very well lead to "the politics of catastrophe." (ibid. 128)

One example of the politics of catastrophe was Germany's own unmastered response to World War I. Although Hitler's rise to power was complex (as is America's rewriting of the Vietnam War), there was a crucial element of psychic trauma that enabled Hitler to step in and "heal" the nation. In *The Weimar Chronicle,* Alex de Jonge offers a telling account of an element of this trauma. At the end of the war, the Germans were unable to comprehend that their army, which proudly marched through the Brandenburg gate, had been defeated. Instead of blaming the enemy, or the imperial regime's failed policy of militarism, the Germans embraced the myth of the "stab in the back." Defeat was explained as a conspiracy concocted by those Germans who signed the surrender. (32) William Shirer has noted that the widespread "fanatical" belief in this postwar myth was maintained even though "the facts which exposed its deceit lay all around." (55–6) This act of "scapegoating" evidences both the desire to rewrite history and to repress collective cultural guilt and responsibility. Resistance to the truth meant that, for Nazi Germany, ideology functioned as "memory," fantasy substituted for historical discourse, and the welcome simplicity of myth replaced the ambiguity of past experience. While WWI should have logically signalled an end to German militarist impulses, it served as merely a prelude to a "founding myth" for its most virulent expression. (de Jonge 32)

This example, replayed in many more contemporary realms, including the current discourse surrounding Vietnam, allows us to posit a "will to myth"—a communal need, a cultural drive—for a reconstruction of the national past in light of the present, a present which is, by definition of necessity, better. Claude Lévi-Strauss has suggested that primitive cultures which have no past (i.e., do not conceive of or distinguish between a past and present) use myth as the primary means of dealing with cultural contradictions. Modern societies, of course, are cognizant of a past, but frequently find it filled with unpleasant truths and half-known facts, so they set about rewriting it. The mass media, including cinema and television, have proven to be important mechanisms whereby this rewriting—this re-imaging—of the past can occur. Indeed, it was Hitler's far-reaching use of the media that allowed him to solidify the National Socialist state and set his nation on its monstrous course in a carefully orchestrated exploitation of the will to myth. (Herzstein)

A common strategy by which "the will to myth" asserts itself is through the substitution of one question for another. This mechanism is invoked by Lévi-Strauss as he notes how frequently one question, or problem, mythically substitutes for another concept by the narrative patterns of the myths. In dream inter-

pretation, psychoanalysis calls this strategy "displacement." If we allow the notion that cultures are like individuals (and recall the commonplace analogy that films are "like" dreams), we should not be surprised to find displacement occurring in popular discourse. Displacement accounts for the phenomenon of "scapegoating," for instance, on both individual and cultural levels. But there are more devious examples, more complex situations in which the displacement goes almost unrecognized, as has been the case thus far with the current wave of Vietnam films and the project of rewriting the image of the war.

In the case of the recent rightwing Vietnam war films, the fundamental textual mechanism of displacement that has not been recognized is that the question "Were we right to fight in Vietnam?" has been replaced (displaced) by the question "What is our obligation to the veterans of the war?" Responsibility to and validation of the veterans is not the same as validating our participation in the conflict in the first place. Yet answering the second question "mythically" rewrites the answer to the first.

One of the key strategies in this displacement of the crucial question of America's Vietnam involvement is that of "victimization." The Japanese have used this method of coping with their role as aggressor in World War II, just as the Nazis used it to rewrite WWI. The Japanese soldiers who fought in the war now are regarded as victims of a military government that betrayed the soldiers and the populace. The Japanese do not try to justify their actions in the war nor even deal with the fact that their policies started the war in the first place. Rather, they try to shift (displace) blame for the war onto wartime leaders who are no longer alive. Contemporary Germany, too, relies on this strategy in an attempt now to rehabilitate West Germany's Nazi past. Strangely enough, its appropriation was given public sanction by President Reagan in his visit to Bitburg cemetery.

That America's problem of/with the Vietnam War might be related to Germany's Nazi past and the controversy over Reagan's visit to Bitburg is addressed in an interesting, if disturbing way, in a letter quoted by Alvin Rosenfeld. The letter writer claimed that Reagan's trip to Bitburg signified "that we are beginning to forgive the German people for their past sins, in much the same way that American has begun to

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seek forgiveness for Vietnam." (96) But is America (or, for that matter, West Germany) actually seeking "forgiveness" for the past? Reagan told the Germans at Bigburg what they wanted to hear, that the German soldiers buried in the military cemetery were themselves victims of the Nazis "just as surely as the victims of the concentration camps." (ibid 94) The American resistance to admitting culpability for Vietnam, like the Bitburg affair, revolves around a collective cultural drama of memory and forgetting. In essence, what we find in Japan's revision of its wartime history, Reagan's Bitburg speech, and many of the Vietnam films of the 1980s, is that the appeal to victimization via "the will to myth" is a powerful rhetorical tool to apply to the problem of guilt. To be a victim means never having to say you're sorry.

MIAs; or I am a Fugitive from Bureaucracy

As of this writing, two waves of Vietnam war films in the 1980s have been claimed: the rightwing revisionism of *Uncommon Valor* (1983), *Missing in Action* (1984), and *Rambo: First Blood II* (1985); and the ostensibly more realistic strain of Vietnam films emerging with *Platoon* (1986), *Hamburger Hill* (1987), and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). At first glance, the comic-book heroics of the earlier films seem antithetical to the "realism" of the later ones, but in spite of such differences the films are actually very much alike in their dependence on the strategy of victimization. The films all work to evoke sympathy for the American GI (today's veteran) and pay tribute to the act of remembering the war as private hell. While the rightwing films, especially *Rambo,* justify a private war of national retribution for the personal sacrifice of vets, the realist films demonstrate the process of

victimization of the draftee or enlisted man. *Platoon* even goes so far as to transpose its conflict from the specificity of Vietnam into the realm of the transcendental: the two sergeants, Barnes and Elias, become mythic figures, warrior archetypes, battling for the soul of Chris (Christ?). The crucifixion image as Barnes kills Elias is too clear to miss, while Chris becomes the sacrificial victim who survives.

The rightwing films, especially *Rambo,* most clearly demonstrate the strategy of mythic substitution or displacement in the use of an oft-repeated rumor: that American MIAs are still being held captive in southeast Asia. That *Rambo* was not only the most commercially successful of all the Vietnam films thus far, but also became culturally ubiquitous (a television cartoon series, formidable tie-in merchandise sales, and, like *Star Wars,* becoming part of political discourse) speaks to the power of the will to myth. The need to believe in the MIAs gives credence to the view that the Vietnamese are now and *therefore have always been* an inhuman and cruel enemy. Vietnam's alleged actions in *presently* holding American prisoners serves as an index of our essential rightness in fighting such an enemy *in the past.* Moreover, our alleged unwillingness to confront Vietnam on the MIAs issue is taken to be an index of the government's cowardice in its Vietnam policy: Confrontation would mean confirmation. The American bureaucracy remains spineless: They didn't let us win then, and they won't let us win again.

Consequently, while it appears to embrace the militaristic ideology of the radical right, *Rambo* simultaneously delegitimizes governmental authority and questions the ideological norms of many other Vietnam films. Within its formula of militaristic zeal, *Rambo* sustains an atmosphere of post-Watergate distrust of government. The MIAs, John Rambo's captive comrades, are regarded only as "a couple of ghosts" by the cynical official representative of the government, Murdock, who lies about his service in Vietnam. He is willing to sacrifice the MIAs to maintain the status quo of international relations. President Reagan's portrait graces the wall behind Murdock's desk, but Murdock is a "committee" member, aligned, it seems, with Congress, not with the avowed conservatism of the executive branch. Colonel Trauptman, Rambo's Special Forces commander and surrogate father-figure, reminds Murdock that the United States reneged on reparations to the Vietnamese, who retaliated by keeping the unransomed captive Americans. Failure to rescue the MIAs is the direct result of their economic expendability. Murdock says the situation has not changed; Congress will not appropriate billions to rescue these "ghosts."

Abandoned once by their country (or rather, "government"), the POWs/MIAs are abandoned yet again in a highly symbolic scene: airdropped into Vietnam to find and photograph any living MIAs/POWs, Rambo locates an American; the rescue helicopter hovers above them as Vietnamese soldiers close in. Murdock abruptly aborts the mission. Rambo is captured and submitted to shocking (literally) tortures. His Russian interrogators taunt him with the intercepted radio message in which he was ordered abandoned. Rambo escapes, but not before he swears revenge against Murdock.

The mythical MIA prisoners may represent the ultimate *American* victims of the war, but *Rambo: First Blood II* also draws on the victimization strategy on yet another level, through the continued exploitation of its vet hero, John Rambo. The film opens with an explosion of rock at a quarry. A tilt down reveals inmates at forced labor. Colonel Trauptman arrives to recruit Rambo for a special mission. Separated by an imposing prison yard fence, Rambo tells Trauptman that he would rather stay in prison than be released because "at least in here I know where I stand." The Vietnam vet is the eighties version of the World War I vet, the "forgotten man" of the Depression era. Like James Allen in Warner Brothers most famous social consciousness film, *I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932), Rambo is a Congressional Medal of Honor winner who feels "out of step" with a society that has used and discarded him. Condemned as a common criminal, Rambo is released from military prison and promised a pardon because his unique combat skills are again required by the government. He does not realize that he is also needed for political purposes. He will provide the gloss of a veteran's testimonial to the mission's findings, which have been predetermined: no Americans will be found.

As far removed from an appeal to victimization as Rambo's aggressive received myth-image might appear to be, his personal mission

of victory and vengeance crucially hinges on his status as present and past victim, as neglected, misunderstood, and exploited veteran. Ironically, in a film that has no memory of the historical complexities of the Vietnam war, Rambo's personal obsession with the traumatic past of Vietnam is cited as the truest measure of his unswerving patriotism. Even Colonel Trauptman feels compelled to tell him to forget the war. Rambo replies: ". . . as long as I'm alive—it's still alive."

Stallone explained the film in an interview: "I stand for ordinary Americans, losers a lot of them. They don't understand big, international politics. Their country tells them to fight in Vietnam? They fight." (Grenier) Rambo and the captive MIAs are the innocent victims of wartime and postwar government machinations that preclude victories. By implicating American policy and government bureaucracy in past defeat and current inaction, the film exonerates the regular soldier from culpability in American defeat as it pointedly criticizes a technologically obsessed, mercenary American military establishment. This echoes both the Japanese strategy of blaming dead leaders for WWII and Reagan's declaration at Bitburg that the Holocaust was not the responsibility of a nation or an electorate, but an "awful evil started by one man." (Reagan 131) Similarly, in his statements on Vietnam, Reagan has employed a strategy of blaming Vietnam defeat on those who cannot be named: "We are just beginning to realize how we were led astray when it came to Vietnam." (Clines)

"Are they going to let us win this time?" Rambo first asks Trauptman when the colonel comes to pull Rambo out of the stockade rock pile for sins committed in the presequel. Trauptman says that it is up to Rambo, but the colonel is unaware that Murdock is merely using Rambo to prove to the American public that there are no POWs. As the film's ad proclaims: "They sent him on a mission and set him up to fail." Rambo, setting the ideological precedent for Ollie North, is the fall guy forced into extraordinary "moral" action by the ordinary immoral inaction of bureaucrats. According to official standards, Rambo is an aberration, the loose cannon on the deck who subverts the official system, but in doing so he affirms the long-cherished American cult of the individual who goes outside the law to get the job done. He ignores the "artificial" restraints of the law to uphold a higher moral law, but (unlike Ollie) Rambo manages to avoid the final irony of conspiracy-making.

Confronting the Otherness of Frontier Asia

In rewriting the Vietnam defeat, *Rambo* attempts to solve the contradiction posed by its portrayal of the Vietnam vet as powerless victim *and* suprematist warrior by reviving the powerful American mythos of a "regeneration through violence." Identified by Richard Slotkin as the basis of many frontier tales, this intertext illuminates the way in which *Rambo's* narrative structure resembles that of the archetypal captivity narrative described by Timothy Flint, whose *Indian Wars of the West, Biographical Memoir of Daniel Boone* (1828–33) typified this form of early frontier story. In this formula, a lone frontier adventurer is ambushed and held captive by Indians. They recognize his superior abilities and wish to adopt him, but he escapes, reaches an outpost, and with the help of a handful of other settlers wins a gruesome siege against hundreds of his former captors (Slotkin 421). Sanctified by the trial of captivity, the hunter confronts an Otherness, represented by the wilderness and the Indians, that threatens to assimilate him into barbarism. Through vengeance, he finds his identity—as white, civilized, Christian male.

Rambo's war of selective extermination inverts the wartime situation of Vietnam into a hallucinated frontier revenge fantasy that literalizes Marx's description of ideology: "circumstances appear upside down . . ." (37–8). Rambo is an imperialist guerrilla, an agent of technocrats, who rejects computer-age technology to obliterate truckloads of the enemy with bow and arrow. Emerging from the mud of the jungle, from the trees, rivers, and waterfalls, Rambo displays a privileged, magical relationship to the Third World wilderness not evidenced even by the Vietnamese. As Trauptman remarks: "What others call hell, he calls home."

Charmed against nature and enemy weapons, Rambo retaliates in Indian-style warfare for the captivity of the POWs, the death of his Vietnamese love interest, and his own wartime trauma. He stands against a waterfall, magically immune to a barrage of gunfire. His detonator-

tipped arrows literally blow apart the enemy—who is subhuman, the propagandist's variation on the Hun, the Nip, the Nazi. Held in contempt even by their Russian advisors, the Vietnamese are weak, sweating, repulsive in their gratuitous cruelty and sexual lasciviousness. Rambo annihilates an enemy whose evil makes American culpability in any wartime atrocities a moot point. In *The Searchers,* Ethan Edwards says: "There are humans and then there are comanch." In *Rambo,* there are humans and then there are gooks who populate a jungle which is not a wildnerness to be transformed into a garden, but an unredeemable hell which automatically refutes any accusation of America's imperialist designs.

With regard to the captivity narrative, it is also significant that Rambo is described as a half-breed, half German and half American Indian, a "hell of a combination," says Murdock. The Vietnam's vet's otherness of class and race is displaced solely onto race. The Indianness of costume signifiers: long hair, bare chest, headband, and necklace/pendant ironically reverse the appropriation of the iconography of Native Americans by the sixties counterculture as symbolic of a radical alternative to oppressive cultural norms (Slotkin 558). Ironically, the film's appropriation of the iconography of the noble savage also permits Rambo to symbolically evoke the Indian as the romanticized victim of past government deceitfulness disguised as progress (i.e., genocide). These invocations of Indianness should not overshadow the fact that Rambo is a white male, as are most of the men he rescues. Thus the film elides the other question of color—the fact that "half the average combat rifle company . . . consisted of blacks and Hispanics." (Kolko 360) American racism, and the class bias of the culture found the US armed services in Vietnam consisting of a majority of poor whites and blacks, especially among the combat soldiers, the "grunts." The captivity narrative overshadows the historical narrative of rebellion in the ranks of the grunts (fragging—the killing of officers) and the feeling of solidarity that soldiers of color felt for their Vietnamese opponents.

The reliance on the captivity narrative and Indian iconography evidences a desperate impulse to disarticulate a sign—the Vietnam veteran—from one meaning (psychopathic misfit, murderer of women and children) to another, the noble savage. Stallone admitted in an interview that the rushes of the film made Rambo look "nihilistic almost psychopathic" (Grenier). The film cannot repress an ambivalence toward the Vietnam veteran, in spite of the noble-savage iconography. By emphasizing the efficiency of Rambo as a "killing machine" created by Trauptman, Stallone's protagonist becomes an American version of Frankenstein's monster. He begins to evoke figures from genre films such as the Terminator, or Jason in *Friday the 13th,* in his sheer implacability and indestructibility. One critic has written that Michael, the hero of *The Deer Hunter,* confronts the perversity of Vietnam's violence "with grace." (Kinney 40) Rambo, as the embodiment of the return of the repressed, can only confront perversity with perversity.

Through the castrated/castrating dialectic of sacrifice and sadistic violence, Rambo redeems the MIAs and American manhood, but in spite of his triumph of revenge, he has not been freed of his victim status at the end of the film. Trauptman tells him: "Don't hate your country . . ." Rambo's impassioned final plea states that all he wants is for his country to love the vets as much as they have loved their country. Trauptman asks, "How will you live, John?" Rambo replies, "Day by day." The ending suggests that the screenwriters absorbed much from Warner Brothers' *I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* in which veteran Allen, duped by bureaucrats, is returned to prison and denied his promised pardon. He escapes a second time to tell his fiancée, "I hate everything but you . . ." She asks, "How do you live?" Allen: "I steal." While Allen disappears into darkness, Rambo's walk into the Thai sunset also serves to recall the ending of numerous Westerns in which the hero's ambivalence toward civilization and the community's ambivalence toward the hero's violence precludes their reconciliation. Like Ethan Edwards, Rambo is doomed to wander between the two winds, but to a 1980s audience, no doubt, the ending does not signal the awareness of the tragic consequences of unreasoning violence and racial hatred as in Ford's film, but the exhilarating possibility of yet another Stallone sequel.

Luxuriating in Their Patriotic Symptoms

Like populist discourses such as Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA," *Rambo*

plays upon a profound ambivalence toward the Vietnam vet, the war, and the US government but, like Springsteen's song, *Rambo* has been incorporated into the popular discourse as a celebration of Americanism. In its obvious preferred reading, the film is decoded by its predominantly post-Vietnam, male audience as a unified, noncontradictory system. (Ellis) This kind of integration into the cultural discourse is possible because the will to myth overrides the ideological tensions that threaten the coherence of the film's textual system. The film does not require a belief in history, only a belief in the history, conventions, and mythmaking capacity of the movies.

In a challenging essay in *Postmodernism and Politics,* Dana Polan speaks of cinema's "will-to-spectacle," the banishment of background, the assertion that "a world of foreground is the only world that matters or is the only world that *is.*" (60—emphasis in original) If one eliminates the past as background, events can be transformed into satisfying spectacle, hurtful history into pleasurable myth. Drawing on this will-to-spectacle, the mythogenesis of *Rambo* lies, not in history, but in the *ur*-texts of fiction that provide its mythic resonance as a genre film and its vocabulary for exercising the will to myth.

In fact, virtually all background is eliminated in *Rambo,* and the spectacle becomes the half-clad, muscle-bound body of Sylvester Stallone: the inflated body of the male as the castrated and castrating monster. John Rambo is the body politic offered up as the anatomically incorrect action doll—John Ellis describes an ad for the film showing Rambo holding "his machine gun where his penis ought to be." (15) Rambo declares that "the mind is the best weapon," but Stallone's glistening hypermasculinity, emphasized in the kind of languid camera movements and fetishizing close-up usually reserved for female "flashdancers," visually insists otherwise.

Rambo's narcissistic cult of the fetishized male body redresses a perceived loss of personal and political power at a most primitive level, at the site of the body, which often defined the division of labor between male and female in pretechnological, patriarchal societies. The male body as weapon functions as a bulwark against feelings of powerlessness engendered by technology, minority rights, feminism—this helps explain the film's popularity not only in the US but overseas as well, where it similarly

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appealed to working-class, male audiences. (Ellis) Most of all, however, the film speaks to post-Vietnam/post-Watergate America's devastating loss of confidence in its status as the world's most powerful, most respected, most moral nation. Our judgment and ability to fight the "good" war as a total war of commitment without guilt has been eroded by our involvement in Vietnam, as surely as a sense of personal power has been eroded by a society increasingly bewildering in its technological complexity.

Attempting to deliver its audience from the anxiety of the present, *Rambo* would seek to restore an unreflective lost Eden of primitive masculine power. Yet Rambo must supplement his physical prowess with high-tech weapons adapted to the use of the lone warrior-hero. A contradictory distinction is maintained between his more "primitive" use of technology and that of the bureaucracy. Rambo's most hysterical, uncontrollable act of revenge is against Murdock and Murdock's technology. He machine-guns the computers and sophisticated

equipment in operations headquarters. Uttering a primal scream, he then turns his weapon to the ceiling in a last outburst of uncontrollable rage. Such an outburst is the predictable result of the dynamics of repression, for the film cannot reconstitute institutional norms except through the mythological presence of the super-fetishized superman, who functions as the mediator between the threatened patriarchal ideology and the viewer/subject desperately seeking to identity with a powerful figure. As a reaction formation against feelings of powerlessness too painful to be admitted or articulated, Rambo's violent reprisals, dependent on the power of the over-fetishized male body, may be read as a symptomatic expression, a psychosomatic signifier of the return of the repressed, suggesting profound ideological crisis in the patriarchy.

Freud warned that within the context of repression and unconscious acting out, the young and childish tend to "luxuriate in their symptoms." (12:152) *Rambo* demonstrates a cultural parallel, a luxuriating in the symptoms of a desperate ideological repression manifested in the inability to speak of or remember the painful past, a cultural hysteria in which violence must substitute for understanding, victimization for responsiblity, the personal for the political. While *Rambo* reflects ambiguous and often inchoate drives to rewrite the Vietnam war, it also shows how in the will to myth the original traumatic experience is compulsively acted out in a contradictory form that leaves the origins of ideological anxiety untouched: the need to reconcile repressed material remains.

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BEVERLE HOUSTON

Beverle contributed several articles to *Film Quarterly* over the years, and served as a canny advisor to the University of California Press on book matters as well. It is, of course, for her work in leading the Cinema Studies program of USC to its present distinguished level that she is best known. But as was made clear by many tributes at the memorial service held for her in Los Angeles, the special force of her personality was perhaps even more remarkable than her professional achievements. She was always eager to entertain new ideas hospitably, and free of sectarian spirit. She had an ardent imagination and perceptiveness about film, linked to unfailing good sense. And even in the face of her terrible illness, she retained an amazing sturdy ability to face the ironies of life.

I remember a bizarre evening in Salinas, California (Steinbeck country—) where she and several other film people were invited by the library lecture series to discuss how films treat families. Beverle carried out her part of the discussion with her usual flair and directness and supportiveness, and with an absolute lack of academic condescension. This seems to have been her practice also when she went to China and spent time with young Chinese filmmakers. As a touching letter sent for her memorial service makes clear, she held up much more than her fair share of half the world: "Dear Dr. Beverle," it reads, "now some of your students with your encouragement have made great progress, and some of their work has won international awards. We will never forget that you were one of the first to give these young artists encouragement." She will be greatly missed.

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equipment in operations headquarters. Uttering a primal scream, he then turns his weapon to the ceiling in a last outburst of uncontrollable rage. Such an outburst is the predictable result of the dynamics of repression, for the film cannot reconstitute institutional norms except through the mythological presence of the super-fetishized superman, who functions as the mediator between the threatened patriarchal ideology and the viewer/subject desperately seeking to identity with a powerful figure. As a reaction formation against feelings of powerlessness too painful to be admitted or articulated, Rambo's violent reprisals, dependent on the power of the over-fetishized male body, may be read as a symptomatic expression, a psychosomatic signifier of the return of the repressed, suggesting profound ideological crisis in the patriarchy.

Freud warned that within the context of repression and unconscious acting out, the young and childish tend to "luxuriate in their symptoms." (12:152) *Rambo* demonstrates a cultural parallel, a luxuriating in the symptoms of a desperate ideological repression manifested in the inability to speak of or remember the painful past, a cultural hysteria in which violence must substitute for understanding, victimization for responsiblity, the personal for the political. While *Rambo* reflects ambiguous and often inchoate drives to rewrite the Vietnam war, it also shows how in the will to myth the original traumatic experience is compulsively acted out in a contradictory form that leaves the origins of ideological anxiety untouched: the need to reconcile repressed material remains.

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BRIAN HENDERSON

Notes on Set Design and Cinema

Set design and art direction have been the subjects of a number of articles and monographs in film and design journals over the last ten years or so. The approach of most of this work has been decidedly auteurist. The issue of *Film Comment* for May–June 1978, for example, had a 36-page color midsection on the Hollywood art director. This combined critical discussions, interviews, and filmographies of eleven art directors, each of whom, we were told, "brought his own vision to that of the script."[1] "The Brave New Worlds of Production Design," an *American Film* article of January–February 1982,[2] is also auteurist in orientation, as is a monograph on set design and production design in a recent issue of *Design Quarterly*.[3]

The discovery of distinctive creators among set designers and production directors is the latest stage of an auteurist dialectic that has earlier journeyed from director to writer to cameraman. The first step at each of these stages is, of course, to identify the leading personalities who expressed themselves in the category of film-making in question. In this way auteurist critics have added sphere after sphere of individual "authorship" to the film-making equation without ever arriving at a concept of genuinely collaborative or collective endeavor. Rather it is said that a particular film was "dominated" by the personality of the director or writer or cameraman or production designer or, failing that, that two or more of these conflicted in ways that were interesting, uninteresting, or whatever.

It's not just film criticism, of course. Ours is a society of the curriculum vitae. Every event, for good or ill, has to be assigned to the credit or blame of individuals. (Otherwise, in a real sense, that event does not exist or remains a troubling mystery.) This axiom, which would have been incomprehensible to other centuries, is so basic to our own that it operates beneath our awareness. It both expresses our society's individualism and is one of its chief instruments for suppressing the notion of the collective. We superficially extol teamwork but relentlessly break it down as far as possible into individual credits. Who really dominated a meeting or a project? Who was the most valuable player? Who should be promoted to a position of authority over his or her former equals? Baseball, basketball, and hockey even devote a category to "assists," which become part of a player's record. This is no doubt a corrective to the impression continually fostered by media commentary that the big-scoring stars win games by themselves. But doesn't it also presuppose that assisting others is a rare, noteworthy event which, if not recognized and rewarded, might disappear altogether?

This said, it is by no means easy to rid ourselves of auteurist turns of writing and speech, even when we are on our guard. This is because such proclivities are deeply engrained in our language and ourselves. It is also because the structures of knowledge about film, as about so many topics, are author-oriented. We know vastly more about Hitchcock's films than about thousands of others. We necessarily draw our examples, not to mention our principles—conformist or antinomian—from, or in regard to, such structures. It might be to the point to mark troublesome words—words under supervision—by crossing them out whenever they appear, as Heidegger and Derrida sometimes do with metaphysical and logocentric ones. It would not do much good to write ~~author~~ or ~~auteur~~ but it might prompt thought to write ~~Hitchcock~~ or ~~Rossellini~~ or ~~Renoir.~~

Designing Dreams: Modern Architecture in the Movies[4] by Donald Albrecht is at least partially a non-auteurist approach to the question of set design, although it too has serious methodological limitations. Albrecht's thesis is that the modern movement in architecture—Sullivan, Wright, Le Corbusier, Mies Van der Rohe, the Bauhaus designers and others—had a large and important impact on Hollywood set design in the 1920s and 1930s, especially between the mid-twenties and 1939. The first part of the book presents a brief account of modern

architecture itself and its influence on European cinema between 1916 and 1933. The book's second and longer part traces the impact of the modern movement on some notable Hollywood set designs. Albrecht focuses sometimes on specific designers, sometimes on the movement's more general Hollywood influence. He devotes approximately the same number of pages to Paul Nelson, a virtually unknown designer; Cedric Gibbon, a very well-known one; and such lesser-known figures as Robert Usher, Charles D. Hall, and Anton Grot. Even better, he treats them all in the same manner: for their relation to the modern movement in architecture rather than their "personal visions."

Albrecht tends perhaps toward that "art history without names"[5] practiced by Heinrich Wölfflin. (Auteurism is a history of nothing but names.) He marks out a period in the history of film style—not dependent upon or corresponding to the life of any individual—and then examines some of the stylistic influences that operated on set design generally during the period, considering in doing so many specific instances.

Albrecht acknowledges that Hollywood set designers had "only a tangential relation to the architectural profession."[6] They absorbed the new style from exhibitions and their catalogs, books, and other materials. Indeed, Albrecht's chapter on the modern movement is built around five pivotal exhibitions: the Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris (1925); the exhibition of the Deutscher Werkbund at Stuttgart (1927); Modern Architecture: International Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1932); the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago (1933–34); and the New York World's Fair (1939–40). These exhibitions not only "defined the progress of modernism,"[7] they presented its principles in a more direct and fully realized way than architectural practice was most often able to do.

Albrecht establishes his case that modern architecture influenced Hollywood set design but that case, if not so well documented before, is not exactly a new one. Critics and historians of twenties-thirties Hollywood have long been aware of the connection. Many films—RKO musicals, for instance—can hardly be discussed without invoking it. *Designing Dreams* is more interesting, it seems to me, when the defense of the overall thesis gives way to a freer exploration. This is notably the case in Albrecht's long last chapter, "The Modern Mystique," in which he offers "subjective readings of the different aspects of modern architecture that have thus far been discussed objectively."[8]

Under the heading "Modernism in the Home," for instance, Albrecht discusses Kitchens, Bedrooms and Bathrooms. He then proceeds to "Offices," "Nightclubs," "Hotels," "Ocean Liners," "Skyscrapers," and "Cities of the Future." These passages are often informative but they, too, include material with which film scholars are already familiar: DeMille's cult of the bathroom, the stylized offices in *The Crowd* (Vidor, 1928), the nightclub set in *Swing Time* (1936), the hotel set in *Grand Hotel* (1932), the ocean liner in *Shall We Dance?* (1937), the paper skyscraper set in *42nd Street* (1933), and, of course, the futuristic cities of *Metropolis* (1926) and *Things to Come* (1936). Discussions of lesser-known films in each category, however, are quite often of interest.

The photographs of *Designing Dreams*—163 in 174 pages, 92 taking up a half-page or more—are as important as its words. Very well chosen and arranged throughout, they do not simply support the book's argument—in equal degree they are its argument. The principal limitations of Albrecht's analysis derive, paradoxically, from the same source—not the photographs themselves but his complete methodological reliance upon them. The book's preface tells us that Ludwig Glaeser, a curator in the Department of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art, proposed to Albrecht, a practicing architect and film-lover, "a study that would begin as a comparison of the Museum's vast files of architectural photographs with its enormous collection of movie stills."[9] Comparing two groups of photographs was not just the book's starting point, however, but its method throughout. The architectural side of Albrecht's argument is less dependent upon the photographs included than the filmic side because it is much more firmly grounded. Albrecht has studied, and extensively drawn upon, the pivotal manifestos and exhibitions of the modern movement, the plans and writings of the particular architects he discusses, his own exploration of their buildings, etc. The photographs function if not simply as illustrations,

then as the parallel register of an argument independently sustained.

This is not true, however, of the photographs of Hollywood sets. Albrecht's reliance upon the Museum of Modern Art's superb collection of movie stills accounts, to be sure, for the clarity and luminosity of the photographs of film sets in *Designing Dreams*. Those stills, however, are almost entirely production photographs, not frame enlargements. Stills were taken by professional photographers under contract to the studios, or hired for the occasion, who routinely photographed a film's leading players in many or most of the film's important scenes, primarily for publicity purposes. Notable sets were also sometimes photographed for their own interest, or emphasized in shots of the players.[10]

Production stills have their value and uses in research on set design and other topics. The issue of production stills versus frame enlargements cannot be decided in the abstract—it depends upon the context in which they are used and the functions which they are to serve. To pose frame enlargements versus production stills as an issue between truth and falsehood, as some film analysts do, is not only fetishistic but wrong-headed. Production stills are as true as frame enlargements—but they are true to different things and for different purposes. They are different kinds of evidence, appropriate for different kinds of arguments. Albrecht's error is not in using production stills or even, perhaps, in using them exclusively. His error is that he, or rather his book's argument, never consults the films in which these sets were used. Albrecht identifies the photographs he studies with the sets they represent and assumes that they appear exactly as pictured in the films for which they were designed.

Albrecht's complete reliance on movie production stills reveals that he is concerned almost entirely with the styles of film sets, hardly at all with the functions they serve. This is paradoxical, of course, since the modern movement in architecture is known for its renewed emphasis on function. The responsibility of form to function was, indeed, the very hallmark of its statements and manifestoes. Still photographs necesssarily omit function by showing sets out of context, not as they appear and operate in films. Among other limitations, still photographs generally show film sets only frontally, whereas films typically show them from several angles. (The frontal perspective in effect turns film sets into stage sets, and those indeed of a decidedly old-fashioned theater.) The photographs Albrecht uses rarely show people occupying or standing in front of sets and never, of course, show them moving through them—all of which alter our perception and experience of them. Finally, Albrecht does not consider narrative, whose effects in individual scenes and throughout a film also condition our perception and response.

Consider as an example of these points the photograph of the kitchen set built for *Bringing up Baby* (1938), which appears on page 114 (Fig. 1). It represents, of course, part of the Connecticut home of Susan's aunt—Susan (Katherine Hepburn) has maneuvered paleontologist David (Cary Grant) there only to have her aunt's dog George bury David's irreplaceable intercostal clavicle. (At dinner with the aunt, the aunt's friend, and Susan that evening, David gets up and follows George whenever he leaves the room.) The photograph of the kitchen set reveals, it is true, things one had not noticed in viewing the film. A modern range is incongruously embedded in country stone walls and a modern sink and counter area oddly tucked in a corner of the otherwise rustic setting. A modern mixer is juxtaposed with an old-fashioned butter-churn, etc. One might be tempted to call this a screwball set designed to go with a screwball film. However, even a casual reviewing of the film reveals that the kitchen set is not a separate set at all but a part or section of a much larger set. It reveals also that the viewer rarely, if ever, sees this part of the set head-on, but nearly always from a side angle and far away. The kitchen, moreover, is never used on camera—when we first see the foursome at the table, dinner has already been served. When Susan and/or David do pass somewhere in front of the kitchen area, they are usually running, which rivets our eyes to them. When Susan tries to explain to her just-arrived aunt who David is and why he is dressed in a woman's frilly dressing gown, there is a shot of the three characters, and a maid, standing in front of the kitchen section. We can see the butter churn on the right side of the frame but, because of the four figures, not much else. In any case, the comic tension of the scene keeps our attention focused on the characters. Such tension and focus, in *Baby* and other films, are not just local phenomena, of course,

Fig. 1: Kitchen set for BRINGING UP BABY.

but effects of the film as a whole—it is one of the meanings of the word "narrative." The efficacy of these effects varies, to be sure, from film to film and from part to part in any film. The dullness of some narratives, sometimes those with spectacular sets, seem to invite us to look around. *Baby*'s absorbing action and fast pace prevent one, however, from noticing even this strange set.

The first floor set of Susan's aunt's home in *Baby*, the area where Susan and David run, could not be rendered by a still photograph—unless several were taken and arranged in a three-dimensional model. *Bringing Up Baby* is not exceptional in this respect. Leon Barsacq emphasizes in *A History of Set Design* the radical differences between stage sets and film sets.[11] He stresses again and again the need to construct sets with all of a scene's camera angles and camera movements in mind. (This requires advance planning with the director and cinematographer, another thing Barsacq advocates.) A set so constructed will elude encapsulization by the still camera: there is no single vantage point that can contain it.

For a number of reasons, such planning is not always possible. Certain directors—Renoir is the example Barsacq cites—prefer, some of the time at least, to improvise on the set. "Too much preparation impeded him. Some of his best ideas came to him on the set: in *La Marseillaise* (1938), Leon Barsacq could never get his opinion of a set until the camera was in position."[12] There is some lingering frustration perhaps in Barsacq's account. Eugene Lourie, who designed eight films for Renoir, perhaps adapted his work better to an improvisational method. He says, apropos *Rules of the Game*:

> Apart from the hunting scenes on the Solonge location, the film was played almost entirely in two basic settings at the studio. One was the Paris apartment of Marquis de la Chesnaye and the other was the interior of the castle . . . In my conception the entrance hall was the hub of all castle activities. One entered the house there from the terrace; from there the main stairway led to the upper floor and the bedrooms. Also from the hall, another stairway led down toward the kitchen and the servant quarters. On one side the hall opened onto a small sitting room, which had entrances to the large ballroom. On the other side of the entry hall, double doors opened to a gunroom . . . From the gunroom, doors led to a large dining room. In addition to the doors leading from one room to another, I provided a side corridor open to all these rooms, giving Renoir a playing area where he could stage the climactic chase sequence. For this set I planned to open the wall between the two large stages of the Pathé studio, making room for the unusually deep set of the main

floor of the castle. I wanted to build all the rooms of this floor on the same set to clarify the visual connections between rooms and allow Jean more fluidity in staging the continuous chase of Modot after the elusive Carette. It would offer a more elegant way of shooting, without obliging the camera to cut from one set to another. By combining the two stages, I would have a useful area of about 150 by 60 feet.[13]

Such complex sets, needless to say, cannot be captured by the still camera. It was not only Renoir who departed from a preset plan—or had none to begin with. Nicholas Ray defined proper camera usage as "the director putting it literally on his shoulder and hunting for the truth of a scene."[14] In the absence of a Lourie to prepare sets that facilitate improvisation, Ray's definition might entail filming against the grain of a restrictive set. The interior of Vienna's saloon in *Johnny Guitar* is a fairly large, open set. Ray does not use it to stage fluid character motions, however—his blocking is rather stiff. Instead, he uses framing, cutting, lighting, and a remarkable number and diversity of camera angles to transform this rather literal, plain space into a visual and emotional texture of considerable range and variety. This is a matter of directorial skills, by the way, not of "personality."

We might recall at this point the question of the production still: the gleaming frontal photograph of a pristine set that we never see in the film it was built for. Or only in the distance or from a decidedly different angle or otherwise not resembling the set of the photograph. Such stills serve, among other things, to raise questions about what happened between the planning and the shooting of the film, or between the shooting and the editing. Did Hawks and Company plan a scene in the kitchen set—either the preparation of dinner there or the maid's serving from it and therefore, presumably, the dinner's early stages?

* * *

The number of films that use sets alone—even in the complex ways indicated—are fewer than those that use sets in conjunction with photographic effects, which are usually included in what are misleadingly called "special effects." In the introduction to his book, Albrecht touches very briefly upon optical effects that are sometimes built into sets. Noting that the spectator has two eyes but the camera only one, he says

> Set designers compensate for this phenomenon by employing a series of optical tricks to achieve the illusion of depth. The simplest of these is the placement of walls, screens, or other large objects in the foreground of the picture. Functioning as frames, these elements heighten the perception of distance between foreground and background. Equally effective is the use of false perspective, in which objects in the distance are built in a smaller scale than those in the foreground, again creating the semblance of depth.[15]

Unfortunately, Albrecht does not return to these issues in any of the discussions that follow—even the points he makes here are limited by his reliance on frontal photographs of film sets. More important for the present discussion is his assumption that sets alone create the apparent worlds of films, sometimes called their diegesis. It is evident, however, that the very optical conditions that make possible spatial illusion within film sets, including but not limited to the ones Albrecht mentions, also make possible the replacement of such sets, in part or whole, by miniatures, elaborately built to scale, and/or by various devices that create composite images—rear projection, glass shots, static and travelling mattes, the Shufftan process, the optical printer, and a large number of variations and combinations of these and other processes. It is not only sets that are replaced in whole or part by these methods, of course, but "locations" also.

Such devices are far more pervasive in classical cinema than most critics and theorists, even sophisticated ones, have realized or, in any case, acknowledged. Linwood G. Dunn, who did the optical printing for *Citizen Kane*, recalled in a 1983 essay:

> I was asked during post-production to make radical alterations in certain filmed scenes . . . There are probably not more than three or four persons living today who really know the great extent of post-production modifications made throughout this film . . . as well as the many other photographic effects techniques that were utilized.[16]

That more people now know Dunn's story is due chiefly to Robert L. Carringer's 1985 book, *The Making of Citizen Kane*,[17] which synthesizes the testimony of the film's many collaborators. The "deep-focus" shot of Susan's suicide attempt—glass and poison in extreme foreground, Kane and doctor bursting into the room in the background (Fig. 2)—is in fact an in-camera matte shot. (The foreground was lit and focused with the background dark, then the foreground was darkened, the background lit, the lens refocused, the film rewound, and the

scene reshot.) The shot of a tiny Kane at the end of a long corridor at Xanadu is a composite of three separately photographed elements. The opening shot of Xanadu "begins with a moving camera shot up a prop fence, and it continues with a series of shots, connected by fades and dissolves, of miniatures, models, and background paintings."[18] (Fig. 3) Carringer estimates that more than 50% of the film's total footage involves special effects of one kind or another; Dunn says that in some reels the percentage of optically printed work is as high as 80%.[19]

It took over forty years for the role of photographic effects in the making of *Citizen Kane* to emerge. It is impossible to say precisely how widely such effects were used in classical cinema, because data on the point has not been gathered. (Film theorists, critics, and historians have not made research into such matters a priority.) It is evident, however, that such effects were by no means limited to Hollywood and, in the European cinema, their use was by no means limited to fantasts such as Cocteau. Although some of his statements denounce fancy titles and special effects, Roberto Rossellini himself invented a modification of the Shufftan process which permits its use with zoom shots. It uses "a special mixture of silver salts and glucose for partly silvering glass to form a mirror which makes it possible . . . to combine action with scale models."[20] Rossellini used this device particularly in his historical films. Among other instances, the Versailles scenes in *The Rise to Power of Louis XIV* (1966) were created by virtue of this device.

As for Renoir, he did not often have a giant set to explore such as the one that Lourie designed for *Rules of the Game*. Like other film-makers, he sometimes resorted to visual effects of one kind or another. In *Nana* (1926), he used a glass shot in conjunction with a partially constructed set by Claude Autant-Lara. The floor and grand stairway of a mansion were constructed by the set designer; its ornate upper story and ceiling were painted on the upper part of a sheet of glass that was placed close to the camera. When the camera photographed the partial set through the glass, the painted image merged with the partial set in a seamless illusion.[21] (Fig. 4). In *Marquitta* (1927), Renoir used a Shufftan shot of the Barbes-Rochouart elevated Métro stop in Paris. His later film *The Little Match Girl* (1929) was entirely shot in a studio and largely fabricated from special effects. Renoir's sound films do not seem to have resorted much to such effects—aside from matching studio interiors with outdoor scenes, which is one of cinema's oldest "special effects."

Fig. 2: CITIZEN KANE.

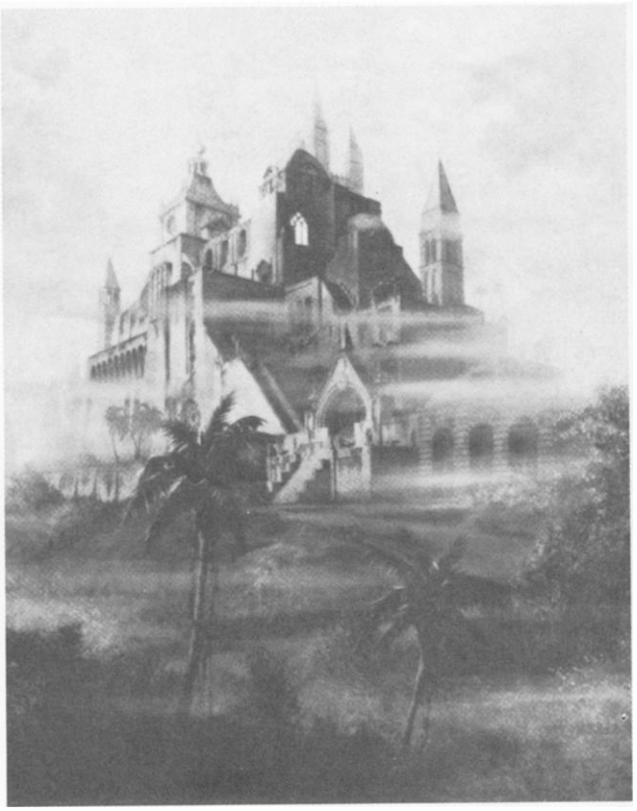

Fig. 3: CITIZEN KANE.

Barsacq notes as nearly a general rule that Renoir preferred to work in studios rather than on location, for the same reason that other directors do: because he could control every aspect of the film more carefully. (Eugene Lourie corroborates this.) When Renoir did

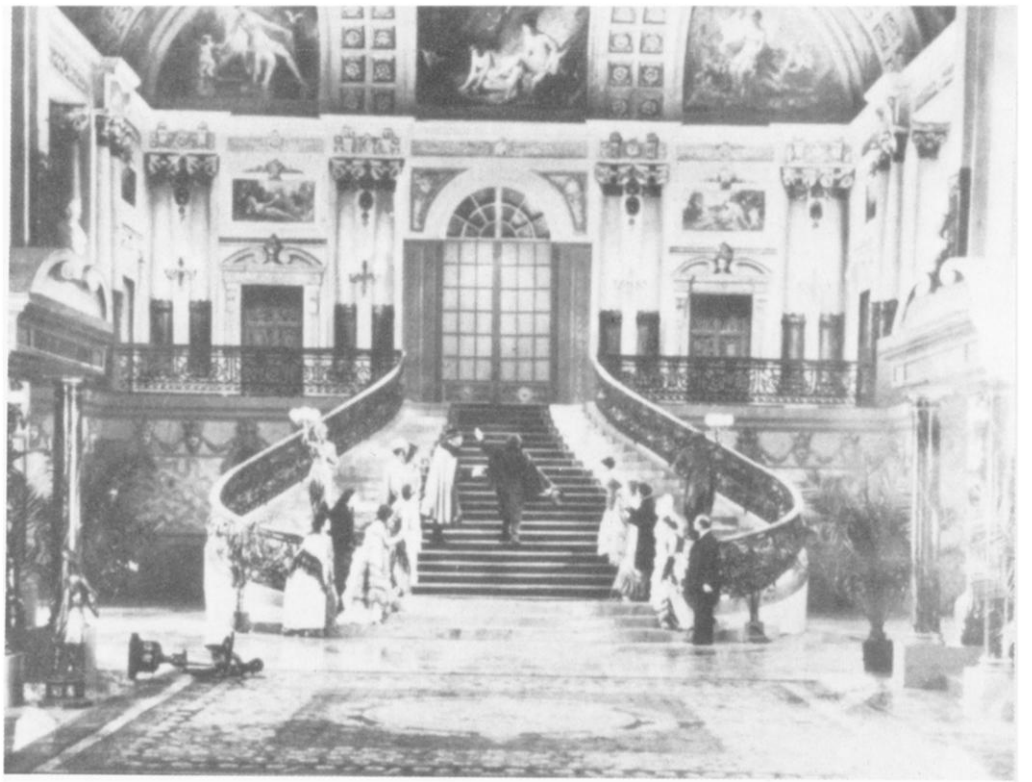

Fig. 4: The set for NANA. *Everything above the stairs (except central doors) is a painting on glass.*

shoot on location, Barsacq notes, he liked "to place constructed sets (the shop in *Boudu Saved from Drowning*, walls with a window in *La Marsellaise* and *La Bête humaine*) in front of real landscapes, using the animation of real streets, railroads, and other outdoor locations."[22] John Ford did this quite often also—the doors and windows of the Edwards house in *The Searchers* open up quite improbably upon one of the enormous rock formations of Monument Valley.

The processes involved in each example cited were, to be sure, different or were put to different uses. *Kane* employed a wide variety of photographic effects for a number of cinematographic purposes. Rossellini used his variation of the Shufftan process largely for "documentary" purposes: not only to use images taken at Versailles—or images of a model thereof—as "authentic" background for scenes that were set there, but also to composite these with shots of workmen working in the "foreground" seeming to finish its construction; and later Louis and his court walking in the gardens adjacent to it. In *Nana*, inversely, Renoir used a painted glass shot to provide an actual set with a fictional upper wall and ceiling.

The films of Alfred Hitchcock make such integral and extensive use of photographic and other effects that it is not particularly illuminating to consider any one of his images—or favorite devices—in isolation. Actors, sets, montage, photographic effects and other elements work together—in concert—to create a narrative that carries us along so firmly that we often fail to notice, or will not to do so, the means by which it is created. In many Hitchcock films there is an odd transaction between narrative and special effects. The effects help to create the film's narrative world; and at the same time our absorption in the narrative either prevents our seeing such devices or makes us impervious to them.

From the standpoint of narrative construction, Hitchcock's films move quickly from event to event. There is no time to introduce spaces before the action that is to occur there, hence landmarks are used as a sort of shorthand that allows successive phases of the action to proceed without intervals or preliminaries. Hitchcock typically begins with a location shot of the landmark in question—Mount Rushmore in *North by Northwest*, for example. After the CIA man explains the film's plot to Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) in a Chicago airport, Hitchcock cuts from Grant's face, as he realizes Eve's precarious state, to a shot of Mount Rushmore in South Dakota. The camera zooms to a closer shot of the heads of the four presidents, which is emphasized further by an iris (a

circular matte) that suddenly appears. This is followed by a shot of Thornhill, framed against a long shot of the mountain, looking through a telescope viewer. We know from this shot that Thornhill has decided to cooperate with the CIA to protect Eve—he is talking to the CIA man as he looks through the viewer. We know, at another level, that the mountain will have a role in the action. (There are nine shots of the mountain in this scene and two more in the next.) Chekhov said that if you introduce a pistol in Act I, it must go off by Act III. Hitchcock adapts this—if you see Mount Rushmore at the beginning of a sequence you know that his characters will climb down it at its end.

Special effects were used throughout *North by Northwest*,[23] but perhaps most intensively and in the most combinations in the climax on Mt. Rushmore. Hitchcock changes angles as frequently here as he does elsewhere, a method that provides the viewer with ever new perspectives but puts unusual burdens on his set designers and special-effects people. The first sight of the monument by the fleeing couple—the back of the presidents' heads—appears to be a constructed set. Six minutes and 108 shots elapse between this shot and the end of the film. The couple's descent and the villains' pursuit down the face of the monument, moving around and between the heads and various rock formations, is accomplished by, among others, the following devices: Partial sets of rock formations are shot flush against vast rear projections of a presidential face or faces (in various angles) or a vista of surrounding bluffs. (Fig. 5) Sometimes the characters are shot directly against rear projections. In all cases, wind effects on the clothing of the actors supplement the illusion. In shots showing the position of some or all of the characters on the mountainside—in order to show their position relative to the other characters and/or to the monument —some or all of them are matted in through multiple exposure. The long shot of the police and the CIA man when they first appear on the mountaintop at the end of the sequence seems to be a shot of the mountain with figures, the actors or stand-ins, matted in. This is followed by a series of closer shots of the actors standing and then crawling on a set designed to match the mountain. The last shot in this series shows Thornhill straining to pull up Eve, who is hanging from the rock below him. A "cut on motion" completes this action in a sleeping compartment on a train back to New York, as Thornhill pulls Eve to an upper bunk.

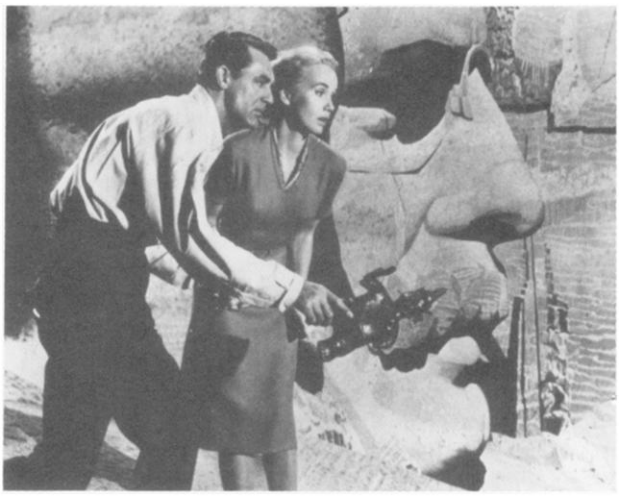

Fig. 5: NORTH BY NORTHWEST.

As a result of Hitchcock's wide and extensive use of photographic and special effects, there are very often different kinds of composites in successive shots. If the individual images of *North by Northwest* are each composites in the manner discussed above, then a narrative passage like the Mount Rushmore sequence is a composite of composites.

The photographic effects reviewed above all contributed to a composite image of some kind. What in each case presented itself as a single image, derived from a single source and a single process, produced at a single time and place was in fact a multiple or layered image, a composite of different kinds of materials, derived from processes conducted at different times and in different places. The apparently homogenous image is actually heterogeneous.

The notion of an image whose production is divided in time and space—not to mention "false" in itself—poses a serious challenge to film theory, classical and modern, and to the methods of criticism based upon them. Theorists from Bazin and Mitry to Metz and Baudry have enormously privileged the camera and have built their versions of the camera-object and the spectator-film relationships on the centrality of the camera. (Perhaps we should now write in every case "the camera" if not ~~the camera.~~) The positions of Bazin and Mitry are too well-known and often-criticized to require elaboration. Jean-Louis Baudry's work is also, however, thoroughly camera-

centered. In his "The Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," it is the camera and the projector that comprise the eponymous apparatus. The camera is the "site of the inscription":

> The movie camera differs from still photography by registering through its mechanical instrumentation a series of images . . . But here we must turn to the relation between the succession of images inscribed by the camera and their projection, bypassing momentarily the place occupied by montage, which plays a decisive role in the strategy of the ideology produced.[24]

Editing is understood by Baudry as the central problem that he must deal with—the image itself and its generation, self-evidently the work of the camera, is not a problem. When Baudry turns to the topic of "the transcendental subject," he begins by saying: "at this point we must return to the camera." He concludes near the end of his essay, "The ideological mechanism at work in the cinema seems thus to be concentrated in the relationship between the camera and the subject." Baudry's discussions of the perspective system are rooted in his notion of the camera but perhaps could be adapted to include the divided image we have discussed, which is also dependent upon the perspective system.

The work of Christian Metz has also been camera-centered throughout the course of his theoretical career. His early work stressed the image's impression of reality in a way that veered between phenomenological realism and basic semiotics. Metz's theoretical approaches have changed throughout his work, but it is not entirely clear that he changed his sense of the image—which in any case remained unproblematic. (For Metz too montage was a central theoretical problem to be explained.) Unique among theorists, however, Metz posed the problem of photographic and other effects in an essay called, "Trucage and the Film."[25] The purpose of Metz's essay is first of all to justify his title's designation of photographic effects as "tricks," that is, as illusions which oppose, he implies, the truth of the usual camera-generated image. He distinguishes imperceptible and invisible tricks but his examples throughout link them to special genres, never to a classic film like *Citizen Kane*. In this way and others, Metz's persistent turn of argument is to marginalize photographic and other effects. The strangest way he does this is again and again to compare and contrast such effects with cinematic punctuation—fades, dissolves, etc. This bizarre conjunction evidently has the goal, perhaps unconscious, of banishing such effects to the margins of the film, similar to the location of punctuation marks at the borders of sequences. Both in any event are special cases, apart from the main stuff of cinema, which is comprised of camera-generated images.

* * *

What would subversion or transgression be in the construction or use of filmic sets? What, if such a thing is conceivable, would they be in the design or use of photographic and other special effects? What models of subversion or transgression might be consulted in making such determinations? These are questions that here can only be broached, and perhaps augmented with other questions.

Julia Kristeva's discussions of transgression center on avant-garde artistic practices. She writes of the need to identify the systematic constraints within each signifying practice in order to overthrow one or more of them in transgressive textual activity. Her examples are literary—Lautrémont, Mallarmé, Artaud, Joyce—but her argument centers on artistic activity generally. The following passage, for example, applies quite well to both the histories and current practices of commercial narrative cinema, not only in Hollywood but virtually everywhere.

> Not every signifying practice embraces the totality of the process that I have indicated. Multiple constraints of, in the last instance, a socio-political order arrest the process of signification at one or another of the stases it crosses and immobilize this process in a structure which eliminates the practice by posing fragmented, symbolic "systems"—copies of a few social constraints obliterating the infinity of the process.[24]

Kristeva's model leads us to the filmic and video avant-garde, past and present. Much work in the avant-garde tradition does not use sets at all—in many cases no "background" whatever. Other avant-garde film-makers deny the viewer spatial orientation by constructing incoherent, dreamlike, or impossible spaces. These aesthetic ends are most often pursued in "experimental narratives"—those sectors of the avant-garde that have some division of spaces according to a series of events, however dreamlike or disconnected. Works in this large

category include, besides Buñuel, Cocteau, Delluc, Dulac, Epstein, etc., in the twenties, Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* (1947), some of Andy Warhol's films and, more recently, the work of Yvonne Rainer and Erika Beckman, among many others.

From one point of view, these works subvert the spatial and architectural codes of the Hollywood and mainstream European cinema. From another point of view, it diminishes such works to see their primary operation as a critique of commercial cinema. They do something much more interesting and important than that—they use space in new ways to create new kinds of aesthetic entities, that is, new kinds of audience engagement with cinematic "space." This, however, is a subject too large to be engaged here.

Roland Barthes's definition of transgression has to do with practices within a signifying field, not of those that lie outside it. This is his emphasis when he defines semiotic transgression as "a paradigm . . . extended into a syntagm."

> There is then a defiance of the usual distribution syntagm/system, and it is probably around this transgression that a great number of creative phomena are situated, as if perhaps there were here a junction between the field of aesthetics and the defections from the semantic system. The chief transgression is obviously the extension of a paradigm on to the syntagmatic plane, since normally only one term of the operation is actualized, the other (or others) remaining potential: this is what would happen, broadly speaking, if one attempted to elaborate a discourse by putting one after the other all the terms of the same declension.[25]

What would be transgression in this sense in the construction or use of film sets? In the design or use of photographic and other special effects? Besides the difficulty of the questions, Barthes's standard itself is not entirely clear. On the one hand it seems too inclusive: if around transgression "a great number of creative phenomena are situated," then transgression is not only common but virtually synonymous with art itself. If this is so, however, then why it is so difficult to locate examples that meet Barthes's standard precisely? And why do those who attempt to apply his standard so often seem to be forcing their texts or fudging their results? In this sense Barthes's standard is too narrow.

To approach the problem from another direction, we might note that Barthes's definition of transgression is closely bound up with the methods and interests of critics, who most often proceed by invoking or creating paradigms absent from a text in order to illuminate it. Biographical critics do this by reading the life into the work; others by reading one or more of an author's works in light of all his or her other works and/or works by other artists ("influences"); still others by reading a work according to one or more theoretically based methods, etc. Barthes specifies works that reveal one (or more?) of their paradigms by their own operation, and that constitute themselves as texts partly or wholly in this way. It requires a critic, however, to recognize and explain such an operation. To say this is to acknowledge that describing a work as extending a paradigm onto a syntagm is always a creative act of reading, never a mere discovery of what is already there. It might be said, on the contrary, that in Barthesian transgression it is the text itself that does the work of criticism. This statement too, however, is a critical judgment.

Materials outside of a finished text are regularly consulted by film critics in constructing paradigms—early drafts of a screenplay, for instance. Photographs of film sets, discussed above, are sometimes useful in constructing paradigms. The celluloid equivalents of such materials are very rare, unfortunately, but are often illuminating when available; for instance, the Chaplin outtakes and other materials gathered by Kevin Brownlow and David Gill in *The Unknown Chaplin*. Scenes shot but not used and nonused takes of a scene that does appear in the released version of a film—these are not only paradigms but transgressive in the sense that they were not intended to be seen. (Chaplin ordered them destroyed by his brother Sydney, who did less than a complete job.) The same might be said of a production still accidentally showing *The Immigrant*'s rocking ship as a set mounted on rollers; and one of an "outdoor" location in *The Gold Rush* showing the edge of a studio set and technicians beyond it. These paradigms, located outside the text, nevertheless subvert the illusions that the film strives, otherwise successfully to achieve.

What would a transgressive use of special effects be? All the special effects we reviewed above depend in one way or another on overlaying photographic materials of different scales in order to create a composite image of

a single scale. The differences in scale of such constitutent film image materials were carefully kept from the public. For instance, a publicity still made available to the trade for the 1933 film *Deluge* reveals the true scale of an elaborate miniature of New York City by showing technicians working on it. "Information Intended for Exhibitors Only" is the warning printed across the top of the photo. To show objects of disparate scale in the same image was transgressive in classical cinema and was carefully avoided, even in publicity photos.

Today, on the other hand, effects designers are celebrated as auteurs and are frequently photographed alongside their creations, including models and miniatures. With rare exceptions, films themselves, however, still observe strictly the singleness of scale. *Time Bandits* and the ship/building section of *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life*, directed by Terry Gilliam, concern themselves, intermittently at least, with two illusionistic qualities of the cinematic image—the relativity of scale within it and its illusion of depth which, as we have seen, are closely related, indeed two sides of a single system. *Time Bandits* treats these issues at several levels: plot, dialogue, actors, gags, images, editing, etc. This is not a matter of auteurism—*Jabberwocky*, also directed by Gilliam, is not at all concerned with these issues—but of textual strategy. It is not unusual for a work to seem to circulate a certain problem from level to level, only one or several of which a critic may determine to be transgressive or otherwise interesting.

In the little boy's bedroom in *Time Bandits*, the picture of a mediaeval knight tacked to his wardrobe suddenly bursts into three dimensions and menaces him with charging steed and waving sword. When the attack is over, the boy examines the picture by taking it in his two hands: to make sure that it *is* flat.

The next night five dwarfs tumble into his room out of the same wardrobe. The latter's apparent shallowness reveals upon closer inspection a surprising depth, a passage, indeed, from and to other worlds. When the dwarfs and boy attempt to leave, escaping the Supreme Being, the wardrobe and the wall behind it move back at an alarming rate, stretching the boy's room to a virtually infinite depth, bounded only by a hole in space that they all tumble through.

Many of the film's later situations and gags also reveal a preoccupation with scale. Napoleon, for instance, is so obsessed with his shortness that he talks of nothing but height.[26] Watching a Punch and Judy show, he is apoplectic when full-sized performers take the stage. "What I like is little people hitting each other," he says. Embarrassed by his tall staff members, he orders them to give their uniforms to the dwarfs; he then invites them to dinner and regales them with tales of other short men who made history. Perhaps the film's boldest play with scale concerns the sailing ship piloted by the dwarfs. A storm that rocks the boat turns out to be a giant emerging from the water—he walks onto land wearing the ship on his head like a hat (Fig. 6). All of these instances, it is true, are justified by the story—the transgressive edge is blunted by immediate diegeticization. The sudden emergence of the giant with the dwarfs' ship on his head, however, so jars our sense of scale that even the narrative episode with the giant that follows does not overcome it. The diegeticization is weaker than the shock itself—it seems like rationalization or secondarization of a trauma that has occurred at the primary process level.

Fig. 6: TIME BANDITS.

There is a moment in *Brazil* that seems like genuine Barthesian transgression—all the more interesting for being tangential to the film's plot. We see Sam Lowry driving his tiny one-man automobile amidst trucks so huge that we cannot see the environment at all. (He is on his way to deliver a check to the widowed Mrs. Buttle, in whose house he will meet the love of his life; she, or rather his own fantasies, will

soon cost him his own life.) Lowry pulls ahead and Gilliam cuts to a moving shot down a row of what look like huge nuclear reactors. We assume that this is what Lowry sees—or is fantasizing—as he drives into the clear. The road comes to a stop, however, in front of a reactor standing in the middle of the road. As the moving shot—and Lowry's implied motion—slows, the huge face of a drunk holding a beer bottle suddenly emerges to the side of the central reactor. The next shot reveals that it is a glass-enclosed model with a normal-sized drunk pressed against it. Behind the model, at a great distance, we see Lowry's car continuing on its way.

Whether this moment is perceived by audiences as an exposure of the illusions of scale or, on the contrary, as a new kind of spectacle, is an interesting question. Who is transgression for, anyway?

NOTES

1. Mary Corliss and Carlos Clarens, "Designed for Film: The Hollywood Art Director," *Film Comment*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (May-June 1978), pages 25-60, at 32.
2. Bart Mills, "The Brave New Worlds of Production Design," *American Film*, Vol. VII, No. 4 (January-February 1982), pages 40-46.
3. Michael Webb, "The City in Film," *Design Quarterly*, No. 136 (1987), pages 2-33; see also Edward Ball, "The Cinematic City, *Metropolis*, Vol. 6, No. 8 (April 1987), pages 56-59, 65, 67; and *CINES-CITES* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987) & *L'Album de CINES-CITES* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987).
4. Donald Albrecht, *Designing Dreams: Modern Architecture in the Movies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986).
5. Heinrich Wölfflin does not actually use the phrase in his *Principles of Art History*, translated by M. D. Hottinger (New York: Dover, 1950) or other books. Commentators have often used the phrase to characterize Wölfflin's position. An example is Arnold Hauser's essay "The Philosophical Implications of Art History: 'Art History Without Names,' " in his book *The Philosophy of Art History* (New York: Knopf, 1959).
6. Albrecht, op. cit., page xx.
7. Ibid., page 6.
8. Ibid., page 110.
9. Ibid., page vii.
10. The fruits of this practice, which are preserved in collections of various sizes, public and private, have been a mixed blessing for film historians. Production stills are sometimes the only trace that remains of lost films, and therefore comprise an invaluable record. On the other hand, most film analysts have at some time or other found themselves searching a film in vain to find an image that appeared in a book, magazine, newspaper or photo archive.
11. Leon Barsaqc, *A History of Set Design*, tr. by Michael Bullock, revised and edited by Elliott Stein (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1976), passim.
12. Ibid., page 84.
13. Eugene Lourie, *My Work in Films* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), pages 61-62.
14. "Interview with Nicholas Ray," *Movie*, #9 (May 1963), page 14.
15. Albrecht, op. cit., pages xvi-xvii.
16. Linwood G. Dunn, "Cinemagic of the Optical Printer," in Dunn and George E. Turner (Ed.), *The ASC Treasury of Visual Effects* (Hollywood: American Society of Cinematographers, 1983), page 240.
17. Robert L. Carringer, *The Making of* Citizen Kane (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
18. Ibid., page 94.
19. Ibid., page 99.
20. Jose Luis Guarner, *Roberto Rossellini*, tr. by Elisabeth Cameron (New York: Praeger, 1970), page 6.
21. Barsacq, op. cit., page 74.
22. Ibid., page 84.
23. François Truffaut remarked to Hitchcock, "It seems to me that there were many trick shots in that picture, lots of them almost invisible, and also many special effects, like miniatures and fake sets." Hitchcock does not deny this but cites only one example—the "exact copy" of the United Nations lobby he had made—in his answer. François Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), page 251.
24. Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus," tr. by Alan Williams, *Film Quarterly*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2 (Winter 1974-75), page 42.
25. Christian Metz, "*Trucage* and the Film," translated by Francoise Meltzer, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Spring 1977), pages 657-675.
26. Julia Kristeva, "Four Types of Signifying Practice," *Semiotext(e)*, Vol. I, No. 1 (1974), page 66.
27. Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* and *Elements of Semiology*, tr. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston: Beacon, 1970), page 86.
28. In the Napoleonic section of the film, we see a recreation of *The Execution of Maximilian* (1868-69) by Edouard Manet, as soldiers execute citizens following the battle of Castiglione (1796). The choice of this image and the mode of rendering it cinematically emphasize the flatness or two-dimensionality of the painterly image, but the tour de force does not quite work—we are aware of three dimensions. This is reinforced by cinema's time dimension—we hear the rifles fire and see the bodies fall. Thus a medium which is two-dimensional but pretends to be three (cinema) reproduces an image from another two-dimensional medium pretending three only to emphasize, finally, its own superior illusionism.

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[*continued on page 32*]

Reviews

WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT?

Director: Robert Zemeckis. Script: Jeffrey Price and Peter Seaman. Director of animation: Richard Williams. Disney.

Imagine, if you can, that the characters who appear in animated cartoons actually exist. A repressed minority and endangered species known as Toons, they live on the fringes of Hollywood in 1947 in a ghetto known as Toontown; when they aren't working for Disney or the other cartoon studios, they take on menial positions as waitresses, bartenders, cigarette girls, bouncers, and entertainers at a segregated club called the Ink and Paint. (Among the acts at this dive are Donald Duck and Daffy Duck, who perform a duet on two pianos, and a vocalist named Jessica, a curvy vamp who's a human Toon, accompanied by the bebop crows from *Dumbo*.)

Imagine, as well, that the live-action 40s Hollywood that these Toons are working in is the world of Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, or at least that world as it was revised and "updated" by Robert Towne when he scripted *Chinatown* in the 70s, supplemented by such nostalgic items as Big Red streetcars. In the place of Chandler's Marlowe and Towne's Jake Gittes is Eddie Valiant (Bob Hoskins), a private eye whose jobs are mainly Toon-related, and whose partner and brother Teddy was killed a few years ago when an unknown Toon dropped a piano on the brothers, considerably dampening Eddie's sense of humor and appreciation of Toons in the process.

Eddie is hired by R. K. Maroon (Alan Tilvern) of Maroon Pictures, a cartoon studio, to photograph the marital infidelities of the voluptuous Jessica, who's married to one of Maroon's stars, Roger Rabbit. Roger's in such a state about his unhappy marriage to Jessica that he keeps blowing his lines—or, more precisely, reacting to cartoon violence with a circle of twittering birds over his head rather than the halo of stars indicated in the script. Maroon hopes that a few compromising photos of Jessica will persuade Roger to drop her and get over his agitated lovesickness, and Eddie, borrowing a camera from his bartender girlfriend Dolores (Joanna Cassidy), obligingly snaps some pictures through the window of Jessica's dressing room at the Ink and Paint; they show her "playing patticake" with Marvin Acme (Stubby Kaye), a jokester who supplies props and gags to Maroon's cartoons.

In Maroon's office, Eddie shows the photos to Roger, who goes into explosive paroxysms of grief that send him crashing through the window. (Being a Toon, he can easily survive such violence, and is next seen sobbing on the studio lot below.) The next day, inside Marvin Acme's cavernous warehouse of props, Acme himself is found murdered, a safe having been dropped on his head. Roger Rabbit, who pleads his innocence to Eddie, is the major suspect. Hot on Roger's trail is Judge Doom (Christopher Lloyd), a Toon-hating villain cloaked in black, who has devised a primoridal stew of turpentine, acetone, and benzine known as the Dip, concocted for the purpose of dissolving undesirable Toons. (In an attempt to emphasize the minority status of Toons, the film-makers reportedly first thought of calling this deadly brew the Final Solution.)

It's an irritating but essential facet of the most exciting and original movies that they're the hardest to describe with any precision, and the preceding paragraphs, at best, sketch the point of departure for *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and the explicit meaning of its title—which uses the *film noir* meaning of "framed" to ask, Who set Roger up? A less obvious reading of "framed," a self-referential and cartoon meaning, leads to the question of where Roger and his movie came from—another mystery, and one that's much harder to solve.

A good auteurist case might be made that director Robert Zemeckis is the main culprit. A writer and director whose sensibility often suggests the jeering teenage irreverence found in the original *Mad* (when it was still a comic book), Zemeckis came to prominence under the tutelage of Steven Spielberg, cowriting the underrated *1941*, *I Wanna Hold Your Hand*, and *Used Cars*, as well as directing the latter two. He went on to direct the less interesting but more successful *Romancing the Stone* and to cowrite and direct the somewhat better *Back to the Future*, another box-office hit.

Certainly all of the above works are triumphs of engineering with varying degrees of cartoonish detail, anticipating some of the conditions that make *Roger Rabbit* possible. But can we, on the basis of this circumstantial evidence, convict Zemeckis of being *Roger*'s auteur?

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What about former advertising men Jeffrey Price and Peter Seaman, who wrote the initial script independent of Zemeckis? What about the novel they adapted, Gary K. Wolf's *Who Censored Roger Rabbit?* (which is about comic strip characters)? What about the director of animation, the brilliant Richard Williams, or the well over 300 other animators who worked under his guidance? What about the countless past animators who developed the famous cartoon characters used for crucial cameos here? What about the special effects devised at George Lucas's Industrial Light & Magic? And what about Spielberg himself—who not only made Zemeckis, the brightest of his proteges, possible, but, as executive producer, participated in the framing of Roger as well?

Paradoxically, despite the number of criss-crossing creative intelligences behind the camera—as well as a team of workers that seems about the size of a small country—*Roger Rabbit* consciously and systematically mystifies the creative work behind the cartoons that it euphorically exemplifies and celebrates. The only remotely auteur-like characters in sight—jokester Acme and an irate studio director—are dispensed with early on in the proceedings, and the great Hollywood animators of the past are present only through example and emulation. The Toons are portrayed as self-generated creatures who create their own gags whenever they aren't acting in studio productions—embodiments of the poetic notion that characters can exist independently of their works and authors.

Indeed, one of the central metaphysical conceits of this movie, underlying many of its most interesting effects, is that the separate worlds of Walt Disney, Tex Avery, Chuck Jones, Bob Clampett, and others are strangely compatible; and thanks to real-life, behind-the-scenes agreements, Donald and Daffy, Bugs and Mickey, Porky and Tinker Bell (and even Betty Boop in black and white) can all rub shoulders for the first time.

There's a hint of perversity in all of this—a sense of transgression in crossing studio boundaries and fusing disparate styles and sensibilities—that is only one of the means by which *Roger Rabbit* moves beyond the borders of simple light entertainment. Although Roger steadfastly maintains, in a running argument with Eddie, that Toons do crazy things only in order to make people laugh, in fact, cartoons are too closely related to dreams and waking fantasies to be written off simply as innocuous laugh machines. The "serious" and scary stretches of the early Disney features are only the most obvious examples of this. The traditional seven-minute Hollywood cartoon, with its everyday violations of the laws of space and time, life and death, thought and action, routinely traffics in material that is potentially frightening and disturbing as well as funny, and the emotional density of *Roger Rabbit* is due in part to its capacity to teeter on such dangerous edges.

The combination of *film noir* and cartoon intensifies this possibility for upset. By and large, the separate worlds and characters of these two genres are shown to coexist and eventually to learn from one another, but Jessica is a character caught in the interface between them. (Even her full name poses an existential problem: Jessica Rabbit describes a human Toon married to a rabbit.) Modeled after Veronica Lake and Lauren Bacall in the 40s, as amplified and upholstered by the crazed sexual imaginations of Tex Avery and Frank Tashlin (the latter worked in live action after a career in cartooning and animation, and in *The Girl Can't Help It* and *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* made Jayne Mansfield into a live-action cartoon), Jessica is certainly more of a sex symbol in the movie than Eddie's live-action girlfriend Dolores. Her voice is supplied, significantly, by an uncredited Kathleen Turner, underlining Jessica's relation to Turner's vamp roles in movies like *Body Heat* and *Prizzi's Honor*—films that are themselves nostalgic pastiches, harking back respectively to styles of the 40s and 60s. Yet because Jessica is married to a rabbit Toon, and at the very least flirts with such live-action males as Marvin Acme and Eddie Valiant, hints of bestiality on the one hand ("I love you more than any woman has ever loved a rabbit") and fetishism on the other are never far away. ("I'm not bad," she professes to Eddie after literally blowing him a cartoon kiss, "I'm just drawn that way.") Such perversity has always been a staple of cartoons—think of the polymorphous perversity of Disney—but *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* makes it a good deal more explicit and unsettling.

Perhaps the fundamental philosophical difference between *film noir* and cartoons can be found in their separate approaches to death and mortality. As animator Peter Burness put it a quarter of a century ago, "In the American car-

Bob Hoskins, as Eddie Valiant, hopelessly linked to a Toon, Roger Rabbit.

toon, death, human defeat, is never presented without being followed by resurrection, transfiguration. A cartoon character can very well be crushed and turned into a plate by a steamroller . . . but he arises immediately, intact, and full of life in the next shot. So it seems evident to me that the American cartoon, rather than glorifying death, is a permanent illustration of the theme of rebirth." In the world of *film noir*, by contrast, the Big Sleep tends to be more permanent; characters who have pianos or safes dropped on them are not likely to get up again.

But in its blend of cartoon animation and *film noir*, *Roger Rabbit* alters both genres in certain ways. Toons can be annihilated by the Dip, for example, and the evil cartoon weasels who accompany Judge Doom on his raids are capable of laughing themselves to death. (The dead weasel Toons promptly become angels with harps, and float off harmlessly, perhaps to a Toon heaven.) Eddie, on the other hand, can be flattened like a pancake in a Toontown elevator and reemerge intact; and Judge Doom, after being crushed by a steamroller, springs back to life as a Toon in disguise.

The elaborate and exquisitely detailed interactions between Toons and real people, Toons and real objects, real people and Toon objects can't all be subsumed under a fully coherent metaphysics, but the film's technical bravura overrides the dispararities and creates some exhilarating moments: Eddie and Roger, in a talking Toon taxi named Benny (whose voice, like Roger's, belongs to stand-up comedian Charles Fleischer), are chased by Judge Doom and his weasels in a real black van; Eddie arms himself for Toontown with a Toon gun given to him by Yosemite Sam, and loads it with talking bullets that sound like Andy Devine and Chill Wills. The world thus assembled (or disassembled) may be an unsteady one, but it feeds on the power of both genres.

The movie begins with a straight cartoon—a Maroon production entitled *Something's Cooking*, starring both Baby Herman and Roger the Rabbit, reportedly an attempt by Zemeckis and company to ape the zaniness of a Looney Tune. It does draw on some of the stuttering and spluttering speech patterns of Sylvester the Cat (according to Zemeckis, Roger has "a Disney body, a Warners head, and a Tex Avery attitude"), but it reminds me much more of a Tom and Jerry cartoon: in its domestic setting, its hyperbolic violence and cruelty, and its overall emphasis on physicality and action over voice and character. Yet there's something about the pile-driver approach of *Something's Cooking* in relation to its classic Tom and Jerry setup (the elliptically framed lady of the house departs after instructing her pet to keep an eye on the baby, and a string of domestic disasters rapidly ensues) that makes it a good deal more unsettling than its sadistic, meat-and-potatoes model, despite the fact that it gets a comparable quota of laughs. Roger slips on soap, is electrocuted, and gets pinned under a fleet of knives while Baby Herman climbs for the cookie jar, unleashing endless

forms of chaos; but there's something distinctly different about the treatment of these catastrophes.

For one thing, Roger Rabbit is warned by the departing matron that if he doesn't keep a lid on things, he's going "back to the science lab"—conjuring up visions in the spectator's mind of vivisection and torture even before the domestic mayhem commmences. For another, the frenetic, juiced-up speed and movement of the cascading gags distort the space of the kitchen so that it is made to seem at least as huge as a stadium—an early anticipation of the movie's mainly live-action climax in the comparably vast reaches of the Acme warehouse. From the outset, then, there's a slightly disturbing discrepancy between this cartoon's familiar models—which traditionally took place in a more "realistic" world tied to the present—and its own hyperrealist period nightmare, which is unfolding much more explicitly in a dream space.

It is a dream, moreover, from which we are rudely awakened once we discover that Baby Herman and Roger are on a soundstage—working as actors on a kitchen set of modest (if still exaggerated) proportions—and that Herman himself is a gravel-voiced, cigar-toting adult impersonating an infant. Later we encounter the same degree of elasticity in space and personality when live-action Eddie visits ramshackle and freewheeling Toontown, where the ordinary laws of fixed identities and distances no longer apply, and the Texan tall-tale exaggerations of Tex Avery gags take over. Believing that he has trailed Jessica up to her flat in a normally proportioned building, Eddie first discovers that the woman in question has a monster mug, and then, in flight from her, proceeds out the window, where he discovers there's an infinite drop to the street below. (On the whole, Tex Avery is the presiding influence over most of the cartoon gags in the main body of the film, but usually in more modest doses; the more minimalist and serial inventions of Chuck Jones's Road Runner series are conspicuously absent, apart from the reference to Acme products.)

Perhaps the biggest commercial risk taken by *Roger Rabbit* is its near-exclusive address to those who are familiar with Hollywood cartoons, which may make some other spectators feel as segregated and as discriminated against as the Toons in the movie. The usual assumption that the world of cartoons belongs to kids, and innocent kids at that, is challenged by this film's plentiful raunchy gags and irreverent undertones: Dolores to Eddie: "Is that a rabbit in your pocket or are you just happy to see me?" Baby Herman to Eddie: "I've got a 50-year-old lust and a 3-year-old dinky." Daffy to Donald: "This is the last time I work with anyone with a speech impediment." Such lines bring home the fact that this is not really a movie for kids, but largely a nostalgic adult male's ironic backward look at the cartoons of his youth. There are references aplenty to movies that unite generations—Judge Doom suffers a meltdown like the wicked witch in *The Wizard of Oz*—but the *film noir* references, such as the nods to *Chinatown*, are less likely to be universal, and adults without a taste for cartoons will probably feel alienated.

The mix of clashing genres that sparked the French New Wave almost 30 years ago, yielding such unstable yet volatile cocktails as *Shoot the Piano Player* (an untidy blend of thriller, slapstick comedy, and tragic love story) and *A Woman Is a Woman* (a "neorealist musical"), is behind some of the peculiar intensity offered here, and whether the jarring mismatches can be enjoyed by the *Star Wars* audience remains to be seen. What this movie shares with the other Spielberg/Lucas blockbusters of the Reagan era, for better and for worse, is an inability to view history as anything other than a reflection of film history (rather than the other way around)—which is as succinct an expression of the Reagan legacy as I can think of.

This historical shortsightedness brings a certain poignancy as well as potency to a limited number of themes but then a queasy void as soon as one steps outside them. I can't claim that *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* transcends the rest of the Spielberg/Lucas oeuvre in this regard, even if it gives the tradition a bit of a bruising in the process of honoring it. There may finally be something morally tacky about equating the neglect of cartoons with the injustices suffered by Jews and blacks—and something merely dotty about the movie's apparent socioeconomic hypothesis that the death of Hollywood cartoons is somehow connected to the birth of Hollywood freeways and the closing down of LA's once wonderful "Big Red" transit system.

The problem certainly isn't that the filmmakers are resourceful enough to broach such

matters, but rather that they use them in a manner already familiar in movies ranging from *Jaws* to *Gremlins* that forecloses any logically developed social critique; the hint of social commentary functions as filigree more than as integral argument. Much as the eponymous beasties of *Gremlins* can be plausibly read at various times as (a) adolescents, (b) blacks, (c) Native Americans, (d) good old boys, (e) people who like Walt Disney (or Steven Spielberg) movies, (f) mischievous kids, (g) hobos, or (h) simple monsters, the Toons of *Roger Rabbit* are geared to suggest different social realities at different stages, but the sum total of these suggestions never adds up to a coherent social or political statement; at best, they can be read as a series of interlocking but independent liberal allegories. The genuine social critique of a *Chinatown*—inspired in part by the Lew Archer novels of Ross Macdonald, which politicized the world of Chandler's Marlowe—is ultimately evoked more than emulated.

But in a movie whose plot and astonishing technical wizardry depend equally on a complex network of accommodations—an intricate system of cooperation and exchanges among film-makers, characters, styles, and genres—the remarkable achievement is that it redeems a debatable approach to film-making around the same time that the approach is belatedly going out of fashion. After about a decade of the spurious mysticism and junk-shop bricolage of Spielberg and Lucas, a style founded on the exaltation of arrested development as a higher principle, here at last is a giddy and glittering labor of love and a grand entertainment that validates their approach to film-making if any movie does, or can.

—JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

BEETHOVEN'S NEPHEW

Directed by Paul Morrissey. Screenplay by Paul Morrissey and Mathieu Carrière, from the novel *Il nipote de Beethoven* by Luigi Magnani. Photography: Hanus Polak. Editing: Albert Jurgenson, Michèle Lauliac.

It seems temptingly easy to make a film about a composer. The sound track can dispense music while the image relieves the audience of boredom with tidbits adapted from or added to the subject's life. Whether the approach is adulatory (*A Song to Remember*) or revisionist (*Amadeus*), it can conjure up a swift portrait of genius—the ability to live and love colorfully, to play an instrument with bravura, to wave one's arms in front of an orchestra, and occasionally to mark paper with mysterious dots.

It is of course very difficult to make a good film about a composer. Before *Beethoven's Nephew* I can think of only two examples, and they succeed because their makers went to strategic extremes. The Straub-Huillet *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* takes the route of austerity, avoiding both emotion and action. Selections from J. S. Bach's music follow one another almost continuously on the sound track while a narrative voice recounts incidents in his life; many of the images simply show the music being played. As a result, the audience is left with the impression of music flowing imperturbably out of and across all the vicissitudes of Bach's life. Ken Russell's *The Music Lovers* merits the adjectives usually attached to his work—vulgar, tasteless, excessive—but then the same adjectives are attached to Tchaikovsky's music, often by critics who concede its insinuating power. Thus the film convincingly evokes the personal demons that could have driven Tchaikovsky to write such music.

Beethoven's Nephew, however, challenges the conventional biopic on its home ground. The film's style is neither austere nor splashy, while any excesses in its content seem at first merely to place it in the revisionist camp of *Amadeus:* great composer, not so great man. The narrative is drawn from the last period of Beethoven's life. When his brother Karl Casper died in 1815, Beethoven gained joint guardianship of his nine-year-old nephew Karl with the boy's mother Johanna. Over the following years he persistently attempted to gain sole guardianship on the grounds that Johanna was a woman of loose morals, and for a time he succeeded. His emotional need for Karl became both obsessive and possessive, and apparently led to the youth's attempted suicide. When Beethoven fell seriously ill, Karl's delay in calling a doctor, and his insistence on leaving his bedridden uncle in order to fulfill his plans to join the army, probably hastened Beethoven's death.

Although the film invents two characters (Johanna's student lover Michael and Karl's French mistress Léonore) it undoubtedly stays closer to the facts than most biopics; but this is no guarantee of value. Facts may be distorted, and inventions may reflect a possible truth. So it is to the film's advantage that the events of several years seem to take place within a few

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months—a compression that intensifies the emotional duel between Beethoven and Karl.

This duel is the dramatic center of the film. It appears at first to be completely one-sided: Beethoven has all the power, both as a man of ferocious determination and as a celebrity with friends in high places; Karl, victimized and branded as ungrateful, has only the viewer's sympathy. The weapons are likewise mismatched: Beethoven thrusts at Karl with profuse words of anger and entreaty, while Karl parries as best as he can with silence. Although the film never softens Beethoven's monstrous oppression of Karl, it does gradually show the duel under a new aspect. Beethoven's prodigious investment of time, energy, and emotion in trying to force love, respect, and musical ability out of Karl makes him vulnerable and pathetic, while the increasing bitterness of Karl's taciturnity gives him an ever sharper weapon.

This double view of the contestants was shared by Morrissey. "Beethoven was an emotional cripple but incredibly sympathetic," Morrissey told me. "I was more sympathetic to Beethoven, and so I made Karl more severe. Dietmar [Prinz, who plays Karl] wanted to smile, but I wouldn't let him." Yet later Morrissey said: "I like restraint. I was sympathetic with Karl because he held back."

I had been curious to interview Morrissey because *Beethoven's Nephew* seemed to come from another universe than his earlier films. He had made his name in the 1960s as the filmmaking associate and then successor of Andy Warhol, with such titles as *Flesh* and *Trash*. This semi-underground lineage was still evident in Morrissey's most recent film, *Mixed Blood* (1985), which was set in the drug culture of New York's lower East Side and revolved around the attempt of a gang led by a kind of Brazilian Ma Barker to wrest a dealership from another gang. Except for some touches of grotesque humor I had found the film cynical and contrived. What connection, if any, was there between Morrissey's previous work and the classical music, elegant European settings and emotional contest of *Beethoven's Nephew*?

"Beethoven was excessive—like the mother in *Mixed Blood,* like all characters in all my movies," Morrissey said. "He was bigger than life—he would have fitted in with contemporary selfishness." Morrissey credits Olivier's *Richard III* with "setting my mind on the idea that a character had to be eccentric to be interesting." And he would classify all of his films as comedies, including *Beethoven's Nephew.*

In many scenes Beethoven's excessiveness is indeed likely to raise smiles or laughter. After a court hearing on the guardianship determines that Karl should attend a boarding school, Beethoven moves into lodgings across the street, spies on Karl through a telescope and sits in on classes to keep an eye on him. Later a patron invites Beethoven and Karl to live as guests at his chateau; when Beethoven discovers that Karl has managed to sneak off with a maid he tracks them down and, hauling Karl by the legs, puts an *interruptus* on their *coitus.* Learning that Karl plans to meet Johanna at a masked ball, Beethoven himself attends in a Batman-like mask, eventually confronting and cursing Johanna. Karl, who has just met Léonore, says to her: "I'm afraid the drunk you're talking about is my uncle, and the 'whore' is my mother."

Wolfgang Reichmann as Beethoven.

The film's current of comedy helps to resolve one of its practical problems: the cast's accents. Although the dialogue is in English, most of the players, including Wolfgang Reichmann (Beethoven), are German-speaking, while the accent of Jane Birkin (Johanna) is British and of Nathalie Baye (Léonore) French. If the sound track at first echoes the unintentional humor of biopics in which American players assume foreign accents, this is soon absorbed into the intentional humor that gives the drama its edge.

In view of the importance that Morrissey attaches to characters—and to comedy—his prime concern in film making is, he says, the acting. "I'm not interested in production values which take away from the actors." He is also not greatly interested in visual effects. "I don't want an overall look bearing down. I don't move the actors much. I don't move the camera much. That's too much like the nervous energy of rock-and-roll, of drugs—energy for its own sake." That may explain why the period costumes and locations do not seem obtrusive or distracting. At the same time, there is a visual variety and firm pacing that make *Beethoven's Nephew* unmistakably a film, not a pageant of filmed performances.

The most crucial question remains: How does the film handle Beethoven's music? Unlike virtually all other composer biopics, *Beethoven's Nephew* never attempts to show the process of composition, and the scenes in which Beethoven is involved with music are the opposite of romanticized: he leafs through the copy of a score, plays the piano part of a violin sonata for a paying audience, sells tickets for a concert and several times talks about the payment he expects for his music. On the one big musical occasion, when Beethoven is to conduct his 9th Symphony at the patron's chateau, his deafness and his agitation over Karl cause him to lose control, and the orchestra leader has to take over.

Yet music pervades the entire film—not merely as background on the sound track but as an integral part of the action. The film's opening scene takes place the day after Beethoven's death, and as Karl walks through the disused monastery that was his uncle's last home the beat of the 5th Violin Sonata on the sound track coincides precisely with his footsteps. This simple device not only introduces Karl as the captive of his uncle but also, on another level, suggests an equivalence between Karl and Beethoven's music. Later, when a musician praises Beethoven's most recent string quartets, Karl's response—"I don't really listen to his music"—reveals more than bitterness: Karl cannot listen to the music because it echoes his own condition, of being forced into the shape of Beethoven's desire. Historically, Beethoven diverted much of his time and energy from composition to his obsession with Karl; in the film, that obsession—monstrous, cunning, pathetic, ridiculous, indefatigable—reproduces his unseen struggle with the last quartets and the 9th Symphony.

The film strips Beethoven of the symbols that have encrusted his name since his death and made it an archetype of grandeur, romanticism, and tragedy. Yet this cool and often comic view does not demean him or his music. It is a reminder that any serious human endeavor can appear comic—and that the comic viewpoint may reveal, as if for the first time, just how serious such an endeavor can be.

—WILLIAM JOHNSON

ROXANNE

Director: Fred Schepisi. Producer: Michael Rachmil and Daniel Melnick. Photography: Ian Baker. Screenplay: Steve Martin. Columbia.

Steve Martin's *Roxanne* is a light-handed and tender redaction of *Cyrano de Bergerac,* a parable about love and art in our cosmetic paradise. The hero, C. D. Bales, with a nose the birds can perch on, is a lively and accomplished man, an amateur poet, athlete, dancer, cook, as well as firechief of a two-horse ski resort. He falls in love with Roxanne, a pretty astronomer who has come to town to observe a planet she thinks she has discovered. C. D. is too self-conscious to declare himself. Besides, Roxanne has already set her sights on Chris, a handsome young fellow hired to train a volunteer fire department more likely to set blazes than to put them out. Roxanne wishes to believe that Chris is exciting and intellectual. In fact, his room-temperature IQ freezes over completely whenever he considers speaking to her. C. D.'s lack of confidence, Chris's verbal limitations, and Roxanne's willful blindness lead to the inevitable: C. D. reluctantly agrees to write letters in Chris's name, broadcasts by short-wave to Chris when the Viking goes courting, and, hidden by night beneath Roxanne's balcony, serenades her with his poetry though it is Chris who achieves her bed. In a rapid denouement, C. D.'s godsister Dixie alerts Roxanne to the truth, Chris runs off with a cute little barmaid, and Roxanne confronts her true correspondent. The inept firefighters shape up. Roxanne realizes she loves C. D. and declares her love to him. Together they enter his house as her comet crosses the sky.

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Appropriately, the action takes place in a fairy-tale setting. The pretty little town, its roofs peaked like those of gingerbread houses,

is nestled in rugged mountains where even walking is difficult and everyone stands at a tilt. Director Fred Schepisi emphasizes the tension of the vertical. The characters look up at the stars, at balconies, at each other. An inordinate number seem habituated to sitting on rooftops, though at last everyone comes down. It is clear that Up signifies escape or aspiration, Down reality or defeat, but other motifs are more puzzling. Why a fire department that forgets to take its truck? Or the animals, a cow, and a bird, and an albino cat stuck in a tree? Why the gaggle of elderly women, and a mayor who suffers from delusions of grandeur, as well as references, verbal or visual, to Chagall, computers, and *The Chicago Manual of Style*? Why that nose, the longest since Pinocchio's? What is going on?

Freud posited that the olfactory sense has been the most repressed, either despised or suspect, since the ape got up off all fours and became human. Penis size and nose size, in demotic mythology, have long been equated. In Anglo-Saxon culture, the hooked nose is associated with the dark stranger, ambassador of the id. In other words, a long nose is not what you would want hanging around your street-corner or your daughter. Our conformist iconography would seek out a rational, Apollonian nose; an innocent, asexual nose; one that keeps its own counsel and minds its own business, and does not wake up, as C. D. puts it, "to smell the coffee—in Brazil." But Martin has been careful to disassociate C. D.'s nose from racial slurs and sexual innuendo. *Roxanne* was filmed in Canada, which is like Middle America only more so, and the actor himself is as domestic as a Creamsicle. Nor does this nose suggest experience, like Jimmy Durante's tender Shnozzola. Its nearest relative, perhaps, is the nose in *Tristram Shandy,* that compendium of human frailties, and its contours resemble those of a ski slope, convenient for the sport of nose-baiting. "Watch out! Here it comes!" one character shouts when Martin turns his head, as if this nose were a flood or an avalanche. Since C. D. is allergic to anesthesia, there is to be no fixing it. Beyond technology, there it is in the center of his face, nature's caprice, pure deformity; what those who seek control hate most: an accident. No wonder it is a "cute little pert little button nose" that C. D. longs for. "Give me," he pleads with his doctor, "The American Beauty."

Every character in *Roxanne* has some kind of liability. One firefighter, for example, has a chin that recedes all the way back to Milwaukee; another is black in an all-white town. A third suffers embarrassment because he is an intellectual. Chris, though handsome, is almost crippled by bashfulness, and Roxanne knows herself but slenderly. If C. D.'s disadvantage is greater than most, he has compensated for it more than adequately. In the first scene, the camera focuses on his middle. This is the center of balance, and he is a balanced man. Singing a little ditty about walking down the stairs because "It's easier than walking up," he is at home on earth, but he is also an acrobat of the rooftops, a star-gazer, an aerial enthusiast. He is always putting out fires in his heart, as Martin commented in an interview, but C. D. knows how to use fire for his own pleasure, too: a cozy fire burns in the grate of his livingroom, its interior revealing the richness of his inner life. He has a passion for knowledge (his cousin refers to him as "an encyclopedia"), yet he is intensely social as well. His success lies in the art with which he does everything. Art entails patience, labor, understanding, humility—all the qualities that differentiate us from the beast and give us what control we have over our fate. Art differs from artificiality, make-up from disguise, in that it does not conceal but enlists the senses in the service of something greater. C. D. is able to detect fires with his acute sense of smell, for example. Moreover, the film implies that gracefulness comes from accepting what is unwieldy, in nature or in ourselves, so that we can employ it to good ends. "Water is your friend!" Chris shouts at the crew he is trying to instruct in using the proboscis of the firehose. The artist, the athlete, the whole person always deals with matter that imposes limitations—that has, like marble, faults one must work *with,* not against. This C. D. has learned. His real liability is an internal one. Fear of rejection has led him by the nose, as it were, so that, temporarily submissive to his fate, he acts against his own interests, and becomes the victim of his own self-hatred, the inverted form of narcissistic control.

The bullies in this film are emptiness personified. Neither sportsmen nor artists, all they have is a windy propensity for violence. In the first scene, a couple of louts carrying ski poles order C. D. off the sidewalk, a traditional humiliation for members of outgroups. Two against

one, fearful of authority, they want to back down when they mistake C. D. for a policeman. The oaf who baits C. D. in a beerhall is also devoid of imagination. As C. D. points out, with such an opportunity, the only epithet he can come up with is "Big Nose." Come to think of it, the bully is no beauty either. And when C. D.'s self-hatred gets the better of him, he turns on others, too. That is, if people inadvertently refer to his misfortune, he feels compelled to strike them. When he believes Roxanne loves him, however, he can love himself, and is just as likely to suggest a game of pool. The absence of love causes the initial inversions: C. D. turns his plowshare into a sword, literally using his tennis racket as a rapier. Yet even as he smashes the bullies' noses, C. D. beams "15 Love," "40 Love," and claims an ironic victory for the power that binds the stars in mutual attraction. For without love, Martin implies, there can be no art, including that of self-defense. Without art, a form of attention, the firefighters are unable to put out the blaze in a trashbasket. And, inattentive, one is like Roxanne when she loses her bathrobe in a futile attempt to rescue her cat, and locks herself out: the poor, forked, naked animal.

The script is refreshingly attentive to language. The balcony scene, for example, contains a complete grammatical analysis of the word "Yes." To C. D., words are magical: a long-nosed witch presides over his writing desk, next to the *Chicago Manual* and under the numinous blue of a Chagall print. C. D. would prefer to name, rather than number, objects in space: "Roxanne," he ventures, would suit a galaxy. He elicits a description of "strange and charmed quarks" from the scientific, quantifying Roxanne that evokes the lovers themselves. Real feeling in this film liberates symbolic speech. Even Chris becomes voluble in the presence of the woman with whom he feels at home, and waxes poetic in his own fashion: when he visits the redwood forest, he tells the barmaid, he always stays a long time and therefore takes along "a meat sandwich." Like other poets, serious or comic, Martin knows language must be exact if it is to effective. "Get out!" shouts Roxanne to C. D. on her porch at the moment of truth. "What do you mean?" he roars, "I *am* out. *You* get *in!*"

For language can also be used cosmetically. It can be misinformation, deceit, lies; "poetic bullshit," as C. D. says, propaganda, advertising. "I was floating on air," Roxanne declares, intoxicated by what she wishes to believe, "Now I'm on pillows on feathers on air." Other characters misuse language in an attempt to puff up their own egos. The owner of All Things Dead, a fur boutique, is an inept fireman who wants his uniform to say "action, wit, style," as in *Gentleman's Quarterly,* though in truth he lacks these qualities. This same fellow tries to pick up women by comparing their "inner slopes" to those in the *Playboy* centerfold; by offering them "hot tubs and mulled wine"; by inviting them into his shop with its "freeze-dried animals." He relies almost entirely on cliché, which is basically freeze-dried thought for people who have forgotten how to make their own.

C. D. and Chris, in ROXANNE.

An indifference to language reflects indifference to feeling. C. D. jokes that he has not had a nose job because the word for it, "rhinoplasty," is "right up there with hemorrhoid" for insensitivity. Degraded language degrades its users: C. D. wonders how he can employ the word "love" when it has been applied so frequently to a floor wax or a diaper. Chris offends Roxanne when he asks if he can "fluff her pillows," alluding to her breasts. When Roxanne questions Chris's muteness at one point, C. D. whispers, "Tell her you were afraid of words." Without hesitation, Chris replies, "I was afraid of worms." Words without feeling are meaningless. The mayor, contriving to turn the town into another Aspen, concocts an advertising campaign that claims "It's winter in July." Thus he manipulates language the way he would induce the poor cow in his poster to guzzle a beer. This same man pays so little attention to what he actually says that in pro-

posing a toast he produces an insult: "I'd rather be with the people of this town than with the finest people in the world."

The film demonstrates a healthy skepticism in regard to fair-sounding speech. "You know how to write what I feel!" Chris exclaims as he urges C. D. to woo Roxanne for him. "That would be lying!" C. D. protests. But his artistic vanity overcomes his scruples. He asks his young friend, "How *did* you feel?" Chris, probing the depths of his soul, replies, "Horny." C. D. translates this as "I felt moved." The script insists that falling for pretty talk is no excuse for self-indulgent behavior. C. D., for example, reproaches Roxanne for having gone to bed with Chris on a first date with "A few frilly words, and there you were counting ceiling tiles." C. D. has also asked Roxanne "What's in a nose?" which recalls "What's in a name?" The beauty of language, too, can be a form of seduction.

All of Me, an earlier Steve Martin film, is also concerned with dichotomy. It dramatizes the eternal tussle between male and female—in one body. *Roxanne* addresses the mind-body split which, as in Rostand's original, is externalized. In the remote-control radio scene, C. D. in a hi-tech van feeds Chris, a microphone hidden under the flaps of a backwoodsman's cap, the lines to which Roxanne succumbs. This division of labor is successful to a point. When Roxanne asks Chris why he is wearing a hat—it is a balmy summer evening—C. D. has Chris reply, "Tonight I am a hunter." But when a taxi dispatcher interrupts to bleat instructions to "Car 54," Chris repeats this nonsense mechanically, and the results are disastrous. In the balcony scene, the order in the chain of being is reversed as the lower faculty, lust, ascends to Roxanne's bedroom while the higher love must stay below and lick its wounds. Words cannot conceal the gap between our ideals and our physical reality, our aspirations, and the earth's downward pull. In fact, like make-up misused, they underscore or emphasize it.

Nor is self-abasement good, as C. D. demonstrates when Roxanne offers him wine in a narrow-rimmed glass, and he uses his nostrils as straws. "Old party trick," he jokes. It is the only moment in the film when C. D. is repugnant. Wit proves a better defense mechanism. In the beer hall contest, C. D. produces twenty nose jokes. Though the humor here remains self-effacing—i.e. "Did your parents lose a bet with God?" "I'd hate to see the grindstone," and "Did a bus park on your face?"—the crowd's applause indicates that in the human order brain, tempered with humor, is mightier than brawn.

Various characters try to escape the dilemma altogether from time to time. C. D. and a fat boy take to the rooftops; an odd white cat named Snowball seeks refuge in a tree. Human nature being what it is, retreat may be salubrious now and again, but the aloofness here is viewed as verging on a cosmic pout. Fellow feeling, the film indicates, can resolve the tension between what we are and what we would like to be; acceptance, of self and others, proves the sole remedy. C. D. is called upon, for example, to rescue the fat boy, whose classmates have dubbed him "Porkie." "Goddamn it," says C. D. mournfully, "I wish they wouldn't do that. But I shouldn't say that in front of you." C. D. asks the youngster if he has told his mother. "Yeah, but she just tells me to clean my plate, " he answers. A delighted C. D. praises the boy for his wit and imagination which makes him superior to his classmates. "But it's true," the boy insists, then continues, "Bastards! Oops, I shouldn't say that in front of you." They exchange smiles. "Do I have to get down now?" the boy asks. "Not yet," replies his mentor. The two remain on the roof in silent camaraderie. The point is that the boy need not be brighter or funnier or "better" than his fellows. Like the mountains in the backdrop, he is acceptable because he is there. A later episode reveals that the nonconformist cat descends from his sulk in a tree when C. D. opens a can of food for him. C. D. himself comes down when Roxanne, her feet on the ground for a change, offers him emotional sustenance. For Martin, it seems, love is the force that brings us back to earth.

Of course, C. D. is human, and a poet. As such, he is susceptible to beauty. Why else would he ignore his fairy godsister, Dixie, who is intelligent, gives him food, drink, and succor, and is without a man? Is it her practical nature (she is an astute businesswoman) or her buck teeth? C. D. gently teases the elderly ladies—benign witches, deposed beauty queens—with whom he identifies; some Martians, he tells them, have come to town and seek older women to have sex with because "they know what they are doing." Denigration of age is inevitable in a society that values looks above knowledge,

beauty above exerience. But we see that C. D. himself puts a pair of dazzling legs before kindness and wisdom.

Martin's point of view on the question above is unclear. The casting of Daryl Hannah, whose face has about as much character as a cake of soap, does not help. A more intelligent-looking actress might have been more credible as the astronomer, but there are other problems in the film, such as unintentional ironies. Roxanne, for example, making love to C. D., tells him he has a "beautiful flesh-and-bone nose" while others are "flat-nosed and flat-faced." She thus commits the error of building one person up by putting others down. What are we to make of C. D. falling for a woman who has a tin ear? Roxanne at first wants to name her comet "Kowalski." What about her lack of sensitivity? She agrees to call this same comet "Charlie" we find out during the final credits, and presumably during a moment of tenderness; but, she informs her lover, "Charlie" commemorates her father, not him. The movie's title shifts the focus to the heroine of Rostand's story, but we wonder if this particular female is worth all the trouble.

These ambiguities aside, *Roxanne* is a moral tale that succeeds in raising basic questions about our values. Its director, as his tragic masterpiece *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* indicates, is deeply concerned with ethical issues; and even a Steve Martin flop—*Planes, Trains, and Automobiles*—deals with selfishness and altruism, conformity, control. *Roxanne,* moreover, has considerable charm. Meant to be popular, it still maintains its integrity and provides a critique of a society that uses its immortal mind primarily to improve its mortal frame—a society caught up in a kind of technological narcissim. Both writer and director insist that a nose is a nose is a nose; that love, like art, accepts and accommodates reality. When Roxanne and C. D. embrace at his doorstep, she gently tilts his head to one side in order to kiss him on the mouth. The camera follows them into his house, one of love's mansions that many noses, great and small, can enter. The film suggests that each of us may do so without undergoing plastic surgery.

—NIKKI STILLER

THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER [ON VIDEOTAPE]

Director: Charles Laughton. Original screenplay: James Agee. Cinematography: Stanley Cortez. Producer: Paul Gregory. Released in videocassette by United Artists/MGM. Released in laserdisc by Criterion Laserdiscs.

In October, 1987, UA/MGM released *The Night of the Hunter* for general home use. The 1955 film has something of a cult following, limited though it has been by the fact that the distributor would allow only theatrical and television performance rights for over thirty years. The video release is long overdue. But, as with many other films, it is worth asking how this remarkable work fares when seen on the small screen.

A small amount of background is in order before we look closely at the film in its new format. The mid-fifties was a time in which the mass movie audience was being inundated by CinemaScope productions, with highly saturated color and "spectacular" subject matter, such as *The Robe* (1953, Twentieth Century-Fox), *Oklahoma!* (1955, Magna Pictures), and *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1956, United Artists). Television was the new demon on the block and the studios were fighting for what they perceived to be their very existence. A generation of movie-goers not rooted in the reality of the Great Depression was placated by studios that shifted their subject matter away from the gritty *film noir* productions of the preceding decade toward often ponderous scripts heavily dosed with color, huge images, and new auditory dimensions—all of which television could not match.

It would seem a bad time for any studio to make a small-budget, black-and-white motion picture about sex, violence, religion, and child abuse.

However, Paul Gregory and Charles Laughton, then collaborating on a variety of stage productions, saw the potential for a screen version of a unique—iconoclastic, some would argue—film version of Davis Grubbs's strange novel about rural religion, sin, and expiation on the banks of the depression-era Ohio River. (The precise reasons and methods for picking this film make an interesting story that cannot be told here.)

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Laughton leaped at the chance offered by Gregory and United Artists to direct a movie. He had never directed a complete film (though Stanley Cortez mentions that Laughton had

directed a few sequences on *The Man on the Eiffel Tower*—1948, RKO), and he was excited about the possibilities of carrying his vision of the story onto the screen.

Elsa Lanchester points out in her autobiography that Laughton, a gifted stage director and acting teacher, was forever grateful to his mentor Theodore Komossarjevsky. That the Russian master of abstract staging left an indelible mark on his student is apparent from the results of his first chance to direct a feature film.

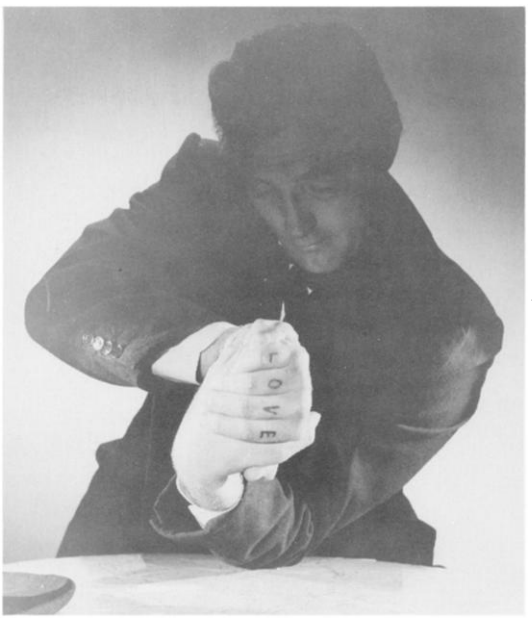
As soon as Paul Gregory and Laughton had come to terms, the producer quickly signed Mitchum, Winters, Gleason, and the rest of the cast. Laughton particularly rejoiced when Lillian Gish—long a favorite of this actor who idolized D. W. Griffith—said she would play Rachel Cooper, the pivotal "earth-mother" figure.

Stanley Cortez, well known in the industry for his work in *The Magnificent Ambersons, The Black Cat,* and nearly two dozen other motion pictures at the time, was selected for his ability to deal with abstract images on the screen. He and Laughton collaborated closely—too closely, in Gregory's mind—to create the unusual "look" of the finished film.

The script turned out to be the first of a series of production problems. Originally authored by James Agee, it was massively rewritten by Laughton and Gregory. (Biographers such as George Eels, Robert Higham, and numerous others detail the clash of wills which ended in hardly a word of Agee's manuscript surviving to the screen. That also is the subject of still other investigations.)

Drawing upon his stage training, Laughton conceived of the film in expressionistic/constructivistic visual terms. Along with the artistic director, Hilyard Brown, the director created a universe of truncated lines, great masses of black space, iris shots, and a dreamlike surrealism in places. It was not the usual mid-fifties film, by any means.

Audiences didn't know what to make of this movie, with its stilted, stagy dialogue, odd characters, sexual imagery, and foreboding sense of gloom. Neither did United Artists, according to Gregory. As a result, the film was publicized poorly. According to the producer, United Artists seemed to wish that audiences would simply overlook what it thought of as a momentary lapse of control over their own



Robert Mitchum as "Reverend" Harry Powell, in THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER.

"story" department. (UA was heavily promoting *Magnificent Obsession,* a stereotypical melodrama about a man's struggle to overcome his prodigal youth so that he might become a physician, all to the accompaniment of etherial music. In this environment, *The Night of the Hunter,* with its peculiar vision of the world—and religion—ran counter to the studio's corporate and advertising needs. The film quickly sank from sight in its original theatrical bookings. But television took it to its heart, and the production became a three-decade-long feature of late-night broadcast bookings. There were also film enthusiasts, however, who never forgot the little film. In the later 1970s, there was a flurry of articles about this "forgotten masterpiece," but that, too, withered quickly.

United Artists, realizing the artistic and monetary treasure that lies in its vaults, has begun to issue some of its productions of the forties and fifties for video audiences. *The Night of the Hunter* is one.

In theaters, the film is an almost overpowering rendition of expressionistic staging—and "staging" is the right term in this case. Chiaroscuro has seldom been more freely used in motion pictures as sequence after sequence of massive black areas, strong shadowing, and frame-altering shapes confront the viewer.

NOTE: This article is based in part on interviews by the author with Paul Gregory, Stanley Cortez, and Hilyard Brown in the summer of 1987.

To an audience trained on narrative Hollywood film, this production was almost incomprehensible. (Gregory railed against both Laughton and Cortez to "lighten the picture." But he did not prevail.) Story becomes secondary to structure. The Walter Schumann score —bass-heavy, while still strangely melodic—is a perfect counterpoint to the highly stylized images on the screen.

Clearly, the stylization which is at the base of this inventive approach to film-making was a disconcerting element to audiences not sensitive to the variety of expressionistic forms that are familiar to trained playgoers, for instance. What Laughton intended as a unifying structural device was (and remains for some) often distracting.

However, though the film received some negative critical comment at the time, the movie was an innovative, well-crafted departure from the ordinary films of the fifties.

The narrative base of the film is sparse: a mad minister chases two children to find some hidden bank loot. In fact, if one were to judge the film solely by "story," it comes up lacking in several dimensions. But that is not the intent: this movie is a morality play in which the evils of religion are pitted against the goodness of children, and Laughton uses every staging device at his command to reinforce that struggle.

The primary sexual tension of the plot, exemplified in the character of Shelley Winters ("My whole body is just a'quiverin' with cleanness") is underscored by the growing darkness of the imagery. For the first two-thirds of the movie, sequences turn progressively blacker as "Reverend" Harry Powell comes onto the scene. The music changes key and rhythm as the climax approaches. In the Ohio River chase sequence, the film turns visually oily in texture, reinforcing the deep terror, evil, and dread that Powell exudes.

There is much to catch the eye, ear, and imagination in the production. Television, however, introduces other considerations: Would the imagery hold up when reduced manyfold in size? Can a viewer see the visual clues and metaphors that Laughton and Brown intended? Does the music function as it did in the original format?

The answers are neither clear nor readily given.

Video, itself, is subject to a series of varying limitations; "high-definition" monitors (those with approximately 500 lines of definition) create a far clearer image. On most television sets, however, much of the visual impact is lost. Details (such as the small animals that sit, cowering, in dark places, the dismembered leg which the little girl discards as she is cutting out dolls) are often obscured.

Similarly, Laughton decorated his sets with recurring spider-web images (literally sprinkled everywhere in the film) but they, too, are often lost in the television image. This is a case in which an excellent projection-video system would probably enhance the ability of the television image to carry its maximum amount of visual information. But one wonders if the limited number of pixels available truly would allow much improvement of the imagery.

Schumann's musical score loses, also, when reproduced on the typical small speakers of most television sets. However, played through a present-day sound system, most of his auditory imagery comes through. (The real restriction is that of the original—optical?—audio which limits the frequency range severely.) Similarly, the voice track often sounds unduly muddied; again, the blame must lie with the original recording itself.

One of Laughton's devices is that of having the sound effects mirror the stylized music and script: the cranking of an old Model T is distorted and grotesque as it is heard through from the point of view of the frightened children. Similarly, Mitchum's screams when he rages at the children or reacts to a blast from Rachel's old shotgun are obviously augmented so that they sound like a wounded animal. Unfortunately, they lose much of their impact on a typical television set and are garbled.

Despite the limitations mentioned in the foregoing paragraphs, however, the film still offers much to a contemporary viewer. The aspect ratio is (for all practical purposes) the same as that of the television screen. Therefore, the particular framing that Laughton, Brown, and Cortez worked hard to create is unsullied by cropping to fit the television picture.

Laughton was a man of words; his whole career was built around his own magnificent, resonant voice, and he worked hard to integrate the power of the spoken word in his film. At the risk of appearing "stagy" or "over-acted," he chose to remain true to the over-played regional dialect reproduced in his source. This "abstraction" of dialogue in the script and speaking

THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER: *Playing with black areas and deep shadows.*

styles remains consistent with the visual and auditory imagery.

Some of the acting performances are actually "improved" in small ways by the translation to television. James Gleason's under-played rendering of Uncle Bertie, for example, is made more sympathetic by the intimacy created by the reduction in size.

Visually, much of the film still works well: Though many images are swallowed by the reduction in detail, the primary chase sequence (the "Dome of Stars" escape on the river) still contains the oppositional elements of terror and beauty in nature that Grubbs caught in his novel. Also, the structural device of a diamond-shaped pattern of growing darkness (peaking at the river-chase sequence) followed by increasing lightness (as Rachel enters the story) carries over to the television screen.

Ultimately, *The Night of the Hunter* is a motion picture that will still hold an audience enthralled, small images or not. Maybe it's because of the "implied intimacy" of the television set itself—its use in our homes, the very centers of our own feelings of warmth and protection—that this story of childhood fear and dreamlike chases seems still to unnerve audiences.

Paralleling this concept is that of the use of black space in the imagery. Though most viewers might watch films in relatively brightly lighted rooms, *The Night of the Hunter* is one in which the audience should consider another approach: a darkened room. In such a setting, the imagery often seems to grow "outside" of the confines of the screen edges, seeping into the room, escaping the boundaries of the frame. Laughton's view of children as humanity's last refuge in a sea of despair is profoundly sentimental and today's audiences may be put off by it. But his—and Gregory's—vision of breaking away from some of the restrictions imposed by traditional narrative structure is preserved in the television form.

Other film-makers have dealt with the darker aspects of religious zealotry, though few with the visual starkness of Laughton: *Elmer Gantry* (1960, United Artists), *Hallelujah!* (1920, MGM), and *Miracle Woman* (1931, Columbia). The major dramatic point of these other films—most "pseudo-exposés"—is that the actions of the protagonists are clear negative examples, object lessons, if you will, in contemporary morality. Elmer Gantry is an obvious con man, a huckster of religion. The Aimee Semple McPherson-like heroine in *Miracle Woman* is a clear and calculating fraud. *Hallelujah!*'s main character simply falls victim to the lure of the flesh.

Laughton, however, makes no attempt to explain Reverend Harry Powell's aberrations; he is unadulterated evil, wrapped in the mantle of Bible-belt religion. A murderer, liar, *poseur,* and "minister". . . . who knows? The viewer is left to decide. To film-goers schooled in the traditions of melodramatic structure—in which resolutions are clear and uncompromising—this is merely another disquieting element in the production.

Lastly, contemporary interest in the decadence of some facets of American fundamentalism (as practiced on television, coincidentally) may add a layer of appreciation that Gregory and Laughton never envisioned. All films are susceptible to changing interpretations that are out of the control of the original producers; today's examples of perversion, sex, and the lust for money may be just egregious examples of happenstance, but they do add another chilling dimension to the film.

Recommendation: See this video-tape in as dark a room as possible. —JACK RAVAGE

SEPTEMBER

Written and directed by Woody Allen. Producer: Robert Greenhut. Photography: Carlo di Palma. Sound: James Sabat. Orion.

As in *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* (1982), in *September* Allen traces the romantic

THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER: *Playing with black areas and deep shadows.*

styles remains consistent with the visual and auditory imagery.

Some of the acting performances are actually "improved" in small ways by the translation to television. James Gleason's under-played rendering of Uncle Bertie, for example, is made more sympathetic by the intimacy created by the reduction in size.

Visually, much of the film still works well: Though many images are swallowed by the reduction in detail, the primary chase sequence (the "Dome of Stars" escape on the river) still contains the oppositional elements of terror and beauty in nature that Grubbs caught in his novel. Also, the structural device of a diamond-shaped pattern of growing darkness (peaking at the river-chase sequence) followed by increasing lightness (as Rachel enters the story) carries over to the television screen.

Ultimately, *The Night of the Hunter* is a motion picture that will still hold an audience enthralled, small images or not. Maybe it's because of the "implied intimacy" of the television set itself—its use in our homes, the very centers of our own feelings of warmth and protection—that this story of childhood fear and dreamlike chases seems still to unnerve audiences.

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As in *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* (1982), in *September* Allen traces the romantic

tangles and mangles that beset three (sort of) couples on a country retreat. In the earlier film the tangles were sorted out. The various happy endings were clearly due not to any realistic or psychological resources but to supernatural interventions, a fanciful version of *deus ex machina.* On the level of plot, there was the magic unleashed by the implausibly successful inventor, played by Allen himself. In the larger structure of the film, *auteur* Allen adhered to a kind of external imperative, the pattern of successful romantic conclusion in the classic romantic comedy (*pace* T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent"), most notably Bergman's *Smiles of a Summer's Night* and the *Midsummer Night's Dream* of both Shakespeare and Mendelssohn. But in *September* there is no even implausible inventor to engineer a happy ending, indeed none of the leavening relief that director Allen usually affords us by stepping his persona down to the world of his mortal characters. There is only the advent of the winter of the heart.

So the tangled lovers go unrequited. The French teacher, Howard (Denholm Elliott), loves the fragile Lane (Mia Farrow), who is in love with her summer tenant, Peter (Sam Waterston), who is in love with her best friend, Stephanie (Dianne Wiest), who returns his love but ultimately decides to stay with her friend and marriage. Across this doomed quadrangle falls the grating presence of Lane's ex-actress mother (Elaine Stritch) and her present husband, Lloyd (Jack Warden). In refusing to resolve his characters' romantic failures, Allen eschews the happy endings he managed for *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986). In effect, in *September* Allen rejects the romantic resolutions which characterize archetypal comedy.

It is axiomatic that comedy ends in romantic resolution because the genre celebrates the individual's inclusion in a fertile community. In the springtime season of classic comedy, the lovers move from chaos and opposition into the harmonies of a socially sanctioned union. Here lies the larger truth of Chaplin's observation that comedy is long shot and tragedy close-up. For comedy deals with the individual in the social landscape, while tragedy isolates the individual in the confrontation of destiny. Hence, one might add incidentally, the charged tragic pathos in the climactic closing shots of both Chaplin's *City Lights* and Allen's *Manhattan.* Hence, too, the wag's observation that comedy

Mia Farrow and Sam Waterston: SEPTEMBER.

ends in a wedding and tragedy starts with one. For the most part Allen has avoided the marital resolution in his comedy. Of his sixteen features, only in four—*Bananas* (1971), *Sleeper* (1973), *Zelig* (1983), and *Hannah and Her Sisters*—does Allen close on a note of romantic closure. More commonly he ends with the modernist open-endedness, either resignation to loss or the ambivalence of lovers growing apart. The volume of emotional failure and irresolution in *September* is not just an acknowledgment of the complexities of modern love and anxiety, but an insistence upon the irrelevance of the classic comic format to contemporary life. Marriage or even the temporary solace of an affair no longer (if indeed it ever did) provide the traditional happy ending, but at best an illusory refuge from the underlying chaos. Moreover, in its seasonal setting, its failures and melancholy, *September* denies not just the pleasure of comedy but its force and validity as well. In this film, more profoundly even than in *Interiors* (1978), Allen expresses his seldom noticed but long-held conviction of the superior relevance and importance of the tragic mode over the comic. In addition to the film's power as a realistic and intensely moving human drama, *September* can be viewed as a meditation upon Allen's most familiar metier, the comic form.

Elaine Stritch's character can be taken to personify the comic mode. Her name, Diane, associates her with classical verdure, which she confirms by blithely plucking flowers and strewing them about untended. She also wears bright flowery clothing ("I look like I'm going to a luau"), but after the excoriating events of the film she leaves in a suit of defoliated white ("one of those needy cases"), calmed of mind, all passion spent. She seems more of a force than a

person. "Time passes and she's still here," Lane complains. Diane alone has lived a life of blithe fulfillment, transcending or ignoring the tragedies that have ruined the others. "Life is too short to dwell on our tragedies," she concludes. Peter is drawn to the life Lane calls "a frivolous existence," because he sees her as "a survivor," when others (especially Lane) are "annihilated by life's tragedies." Diane is a comedienne in the French sense of actress, as well as for her hedonistic, "playgirl" life, as chronicled in the scandal sheets and now in her memoirs. There is an element of the comic in her association with story-telling. She overflows with fictions, whether autobiographic anecdotes or quips. In contrast, the blocked Peter abandons his attempt to write a novel based on his father (a history professor who survived blacklisting by making his career in gambling, another comedic survivor) because "It's lifeless"; instead he settles on the hack work for Lane's mother.

Most obviously, the comic Diane has most of the film's funny lines. Indeed she is the only character in control of her funny lines. She is the film's one wit. The other characters may have an occasional thigh-slapper but it is usually at their own expense or an unwitting irony. For example, Stephanie confesses that she won't let her radiologist husband take an X-ray of her because he'd see things he couldn't understand and be "terribly hurt." This is an extremely witty metaphor for a woman closed against her husband, but only the anxiety, not the wit, is the character's. Diane has the jokes. In these specifics, she differs markedly from the two mother figures in Allen's earlier noncomedy, *Interiors*. Diane combines the vulgarian vitality of Pearl (Maureen Stapleton) with the chilling authority of Eve (Geraldine Page). Despite her humor, though, there is a callousness and cruelty as Stritch performs Diane that perhaps go beyond what Mia Farrow's real-life mother, Maureen O'Sullivan, might comfortably have given in the role as originally cast.

Similary, by replacing the brashly American Charles Durning with the tonier English Denholm Elliott in the role of Lane's loving neighbor, and casting the gruff Jack Warden instead of Elliott as Diane's husband, Allen shifted the higher-culture lover from the earthy actress to her sensitive and more artistic daughter (Lane is a would-be photographer incapacitated by her negative thinking). The casting changes emphasize the cultural context in which Diane can be read as the comic. The character of Peter was significantly hollowed out, perhaps even demystified, when its presenter was changed from the epic romanticism of Sam Shepard to the moodiness of Christopher Walken, and finally to the reedy infidelity of Sam Waterston, substantially repeating his role in *Hannah and Her Sisters*. As Peter shifts from his primary relationship with Lane to a calculated fling with Stephanie and then the pandering relationship with Diane, he shrinks from artist to a figure of comic inadequacy.

As the personification of comedy, Diane is a vital energy insensitive to time. Lloyd makes this point metaphorically when he describes their meeting in a shared taxicab: "By the time the meter hit three dollars she had her tongue in my ear." But the comic vision is fatally limited by its inability to deal with the fact of mortality. So Diane is sobered when she checks her make-up in the mirror and notes the absence of any future. Later she considers trying to merge her liver spots into a tan. In a more immediate deficiency, the comic is self-absorbed. Diane does not hear Lane's plans to sell her house, which leads to their climactic quarrel. When Diane decides finally to leave the house to Lane, she inconsistently chases out the prospective buyers. Earlier, Diane referred to Lane's previous lover, Jack, as Jeff, confusing him with a revived memory of her own dates with Jeff Chandler. Lane justly charges her mother with selfishness and insensitivity to others: "Don't you ever listen when I talk?" Her fictioning proves irresponsible when she alternately forces Lane and Peter together and lies to them about each other. We learn even worse when Lane charges that it was her mother who shot her lover; Lane "only said the things the lawyers told me to say." From Diane's stricken look and from her earlier confession over the ouija board to Lane's father ("I'm a tough cookie. I can file and forget. . . . [but] I want her to forgive me.") we can believe Lane's charge. Lane's life was ruined at the age of 14, when she bore her mother's guilt. Like comedy, Diane has only a partial vision even of her own experience; the tragic persists.

In contrast to the raunchy, selfish frivolity of Diane's comedy, Allen implicitly develops an alternative kind of wit, an ironic but compassionate observation of others. The film's richest pleasure derives from Allen's subtle and touch-

ing revelation of his characters. The choreographed close-ups as he details the shifting relationships between Stephanie, Lane, and Peter, for example, are both moving and witty. Without or despite their words, the characters express their timorous yearnings and fears. Allen's dramatic ironies make the charcters seem trapped and defined beyond their awareness. Thus Lane enters just as her suitor Howard admits to having nothing at home to which to go back. The camera holds tellingly on Stephanie after she admits to Howard that Lane might well have fallen in love with Peter. There is also Allen's usual witty score, the classic tunes speaking wordlessly for the characters. Stephanie's piano medley concludes with "I'm Confessing (That I Love You)" just after Howard has finally expressed his love to Lane and Lloyd has told Peter about his love for Diane. Yet the song also represents Stephanie's having worked around to expressing her love for (if not to) Peter.

In perhaps the film's central statement, Lloyd describes his profession in physics in terms applicable to Allen's mature filmmaking. For both men, the job involves confronting the ineluctable doom in the universe and in the individual life. Lloyd studies the random nature of existence, knowing that the entire universe will eventually "vanish forever—the universe, all space, all time, it's just a temporary convulsion. And I get paid to prove it." For Allen as for Lloyd, the universe is "hapazard, morally neutral and unimaginably violent." As a consequence Lloyd clings to Diane while he sleeps so he won't dream of photons and quarks. But the comic muse, pure and traditional, holds no such solace for Allen. Just as Lloyd makes this admission, Allen shows Howard quietly rise and leave, having overheard the physicist define in cosmic terms his own profound isolation. Peter's response is more trivial: "Don't say that. I have to sleep alone tonight," he says, but then proceeds to seduce Stephanie. The annihilating force of nature is brought home by the storm, which floods a neighbor's house and which leaves our characters "powerless," lit only by candles for the middle third of the film.

Stephanie faces domestic versions of these cosmic threats but by her own admission can only run from them. When the lights go out she starts to play the piano ("What'll I Do?") and she is still/again playing when the lights and phonograph return to life. Her flirtation and affair with Peter is an attempt to run from her impatience with her husband, expressed at his phone calls. But then she runs from the affair, to recover her friendship with Lane. To Lane she prescribes a life of small consolations, a domestic version of Diane's (the comic) frivolous life: "Tomorrow will come and you'll find distractions . . . a million petty things to keep you going." Of course, none will be able to deal with Lane's rending grief. "I'm so lonely," she weeps, and there is no consolation for her. When she rejects suicide because "That's my problem: I always wanted to live," Lane is defined as a liver manquée, whose spirit and hope were sapped by the indomitable simple-mindedness of her mother, the merely comic spirit.

Of all the nostalgic songs that silently speak for the film's failed lovers, perhaps the dominant one is "Slow Boat to China." The lyrics normally express the lover's desire to be isolated with his beloved, away from threat of rival or other form of loss. But here there is no security in isolation. As Stephanie explains to Lane: "We're all up here, isolated from the world. Unpredictable things happen." But what happened was the collision of emotional needs, the lovers' cushioned version of the Big Bang, dread source of our random and amoral existence. There's one period song that Stephanie does not play. She does not have to play Kurt Weill's classic because Woody Allen's film is his "September Song." It's also about his own artistic choices and the failure of the comic vision to fathom the deepest or outermost blues. —MAURICE YACOWAR

Books

[Some of the following reviews are held over from the Miscellaneous category of our Summer issue book round-up. For the brief annotations in that category, see page 63.]

CAN'T HELP SINGIN'
The American Musical on Stage and Screen

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This survey is intelligent in its attempts both to connect the musical to artistic progenitors

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Also useful is Mast's attention to the particular historical backdrops against which the musical was produced. Mast's updating of his topic is, however, troublesome; while he touches on works which already seem a bit peripheral (Coppola's *The Cotton Club*), he shows very little interest in the role of rock music in the movies, including the early films of Elvis Presley and The Beatles (although films which involve the cooptation of rock in the 1970s and 80s—*Saturday Night Fever* and *Flashdance*—are recognized for their closer adherence to Mast's definition of the musical). One contention of the book is that the musical, always an essentially conservative and nostalgic form, is in contention with rock, the music video, and the more cynical culture they represent. While the musical (unlike, say, the western) can still find an audience in the post-60s period, its configuration is increasingly peculiar (*Cabaret, A Chorus Line, Pennies from Heaven*) and a long way from the world mediated by Rodgers and Hammerstein or Gershwin.

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HITCHCOCK AND SELZNICK

***The Rich and Strange Collaboration of Alfred Hitchcock and David O. Selznick in Hollywood.* By Leonard J. Leff. New York: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1987. $22.50.**

Leonard Leff has a keen eye. He notices that Lars Thorwald (Raymond Burr), the murderer in *Rear Window,* is unmistakably modeled on David O. Selznick, the Hollywood producer and studio head with whom Hitchcock had had a troubled ten-year association. This *coup de grâce* is not just one of Hitchcock's jokes. We need only recall Thorwald's words to L. B. Jeffries (Jimmy Stewart) as the latter, incapacitated in his wheelchair, pops off flash-bulbs in Thorwald's rimless glasses. These words—"What do you want with me?"—are surprisingly plaintive, even though by now in the film we know (or think we know) what Thorwald is capable of doing. He cuts people up.

Something of this plaintiveness survives in Leff's rather wonderful book. What *did* Hitchcock and Sleznick want with, or from, each other? What did they get? At one level Hitchcock and Selznick, it seems, got a lot from each other—a lot of what they wanted, a lot of what they needed, a lot they chose, for better or for worse, to battle, evade, or disregard.

Hitchcock's association with Selznick was based on a paradox, however; "more than either acknowledged, they joined forces primarily to extend their independence as film-

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HITCHCOCK AND SELZNICK

***The Rich and Strange Collaboration of Alfred Hitchcock and David O. Selznick in Hollywood.* By Leonard J. Leff. New York: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1987. $22.50.**

Leonard Leff has a keen eye. He notices that Lars Thorwald (Raymond Burr), the murderer in *Rear Window,* is unmistakably modeled on David O. Selznick, the Hollywood producer and studio head with whom Hitchcock had had a troubled ten-year association. This *coup de grâce* is not just one of Hitchcock's jokes. We need only recall Thorwald's words to L. B. Jeffries (Jimmy Stewart) as the latter, incapacitated in his wheelchair, pops off flash-bulbs in Thorwald's rimless glasses. These words—"What do you want with me?"—are surprisingly plaintive, even though by now in the film we know (or think we know) what Thorwald is capable of doing. He cuts people up.

Something of this plaintiveness survives in Leff's rather wonderful book. What *did* Hitchcock and Sleznick want with, or from, each other? What did they get? At one level Hitchcock and Selznick, it seems, got a lot from each other—a lot of what they wanted, a lot of what they needed, a lot they chose, for better or for worse, to battle, evade, or disregard.

Hitchcock's association with Selznick was based on a paradox, however; "more than either acknowledged, they joined forces primarily to extend their independence as film-

(operetta, vaudeville, certain forms of melodrama) and to define it as a specific genre, distinct from films which simply make substantial use of music to flesh out their narratives. The book is finely nuanced, with attention to subgenres within the musical and to particular creators whose work has strongly inflected the form's whole aspect (Mast's comments on Fred Astaire are especially enjoyable and intelligent). Most interesting is Mast's attention to the role of minorities in creating the genre, and his extended remarks on Cole Porter and the gay sensibility acknowledge a topic usually sidestepped in criticism of the musical. Mast not only attempts a definition of the gay sensibility (a tricky business this) but shows how the American musical became an enclave for gay artists which ultimately produced a body of work widely embraced by the mainstream audience, perhaps revealing fundamental contradictions in the self-image conservative America likes to perpetuate in its popular culture.

Also useful is Mast's attention to the particular historical backdrops against which the musical was produced. Mast's updating of his topic is, however, troublesome; while he touches on works which already seem a bit peripheral (Coppola's *The Cotton Club*), he shows very little interest in the role of rock music in the movies, including the early films of Elvis Presley and The Beatles (although films which involve the cooptation of rock in the 1970s and 80s—*Saturday Night Fever* and *Flashdance*—are recognized for their closer adherence to Mast's definition of the musical). One contention of the book is that the musical, always an essentially conservative and nostalgic form, is in contention with rock, the music video, and the more cynical culture they represent. While the musical (unlike, say, the western) can still find an audience in the post-60s period, its configuration is increasingly peculiar (*Cabaret, A Chorus Line, Pennies from Heaven*) and a long way from the world mediated by Rodgers and Hammerstein or Gershwin.

—CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT

ACTING IN THE CINEMA

By James Naremore. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. $24.95.

A richly detailed study of acting as a crucial component of the aesthetic impact of film—from the earliest shorts of Chaplin to recent features with Robert De Niro. Develops a method of analyzing performance in the age of mechanical reproduction, and connects screen behavior with the presentation of self in society.

INVISIBLE STORYTELLERS
Voice-Over Narration in American Fiction Film

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Hitchcock's association with Selznick was based on a paradox, however; "more than either acknowledged, they joined forces primarily to extend their independence as film-

makers," and as film-makers who wanted control of the entire production process of their films. It's not clear, as Leff thinks, that Hitchcock in 1938 "lacked the wherewithal to attain international status" without Selznick's help. He was already better known internationally than any other British director, and was already adept at pursuing the celebrity he craved, and that others in Hollywood besides Selznick were dangling before him. On the other hand, the "little British thrillers" tag was grist to the mill of Polo Lounge cynics. Hitchcock's American career, initially at any rate, benefitted enormously from Selznick's sponsorship. "Selznick not only brought Hitchcock to Hollywood, but offered him stories and actors commensurate with his presumed talent . . . Hitchcock added bite to Selznick's style, Selznick added American gloss to Hitchcock's."

But what an odd couple they must have been. That "Hitchcock and Selznick never meshed" may be one of the century's understatements. Leff's characterizations—Selznick was no more typical as mogul than Hitchcock as director—are deft. "Words came easily to Selznick" (another understatement). "Chronically disorganized, but relentlessly verbal, he threw long-winded memoranda"—the famous "notes" that substituted for middle-management at Selznick International—"at a chaos he sometimes helped to create," a chaos that extended into his personal life and outwards again into the day-to-day running of the studio. Hitchcock's circumspect, self-contained (but deliberately constructed) persona, by contrast, incorporated "order, stillness and a fair share of enigma." According to Walter Wanger, for whom he made *Foreign Correspondent* in 1940, Hitchcock would "never reveal fatigue or worry" on the set. In Leff's words, Hitchcock "projected imperturbability, utter confidence, supreme knowledge—[a] sardonic mountain of assurance." (Hitchcock to an extra in *Spellbound:* "The next shot, Norman, will be a close-up of you in a sweat. Please start sweating now." Leff notes that for "a director who gave dozens of interviews, Hitchcock gave away very little." "I don't seek out publicity," said Hitchcock, laconically (and disingenuously), "it seeks me." Once sought, Hitchcock would "comment at length on the mechanics of his films—the lighting, the special effects, the problems with actors—but he rarely spoke of their essence: guilt, passion and repression." According to his own admission—"mon film est terminé avant le tournage," he said to *Cahiers du Cinéma*—Hitchcock's "elaborate [pre-production] planning left him bored during the period of principal photography," the very period when Selznick's voluminous missives would fly thick and fast.

If everything about Hitchcock, the ponderous wit, the booming voice, even the dark suits, was designed to keep other people at a distance, he may have met his match in Selznick, even if it's hard to imagine anyone else keeping Selznick negotiating a new contract for almost two years, as Hitchcock did at the time of *The Paradine Case.* The clash was aesthetic as well as financial. "Selznick defined cinema in terms of the past, applying to it the rules of another medium [the novel], and another century [the nineteenth] . . . he remained bound to the logical and the verbal." Hitchcock, by contrast, "embraced the inexplicable and the visual." But Hitchcock's celebrated control—of actors, of props, of audiences—had its preconditions. He would "waltz through the period of principal photography," but "he enjoyed the luxury of false starts, blind alleys and woolgathering while preparing a script. Rushing just to brighten a Selznick balance-sheet hardly suited him," even though this was the very thing Selznick all too frequently insisted upon. Hitchcock bridled under such unwanted "supervision." Worse still, Selznick, who bristled in his turn at Hitchcock's working methods, would routinely view the daily rushes over and over again, brood over characterization, change the script, invade the set (in person or with a spy), and issue paper-chains by the ream. And Selznick, "an inveterate tinkerer," was careful to retain control over editing. "As long as a film was in his hands," his production assistant, Linda Schiller, recalled, "he was never satisfied." Editing, as Leff aptly puts it, "licensed [Selznick's] indecision. . . . Running an entire film endlessly through his fingers, Selznick could dictate not only the juxtaposition of shots, the pace and rhythm, but also the placement, volume and cuing of the music. The next day he could change it all . . . [he] loved the freedom that miles and miles of footage offered him."

Yet this was a freedom that Hitchcock withheld, by protecting his work against post-production meddling far better than most other directors. Since he never shot scenes "around the clock" (from every conceivable angle) and rarely did alternate takes, his "cutting in the

camera" gave his producers little chance to alter a film in post-production; "goddamn jigsaw cutting," an irate Selznick called it, thus preparing the ground for what Jimmy Stewart was to accuse Raymond Burr of having done.

Small wonder, then, that Leff can characterize the Hitchcock-Selznick combination as having "terrific marquee value . . . but volatile chemistry." Each of these was quick to assert itself. With *Rebecca* (1940), Leff notes, Selznick gave Hitchcock "an auspicious American debut. . . . Few Hollywood moguls could have managed Hitchcock's transition to American film-making with as much distinction." On the one hand, Selznick "assigned *Rebecca* to Hitchcock, stretched its budget to almost a million dollars, and forced the director to explore the psychological intensity of the narrative"; on the other, Hitchcock was not wrong to distance himself in retrospect from what was "not a Hitchcock picture." He was the instrument of its production more than anything else. Yet after four years of subsequent independence from Selznick it must have rankled that "no film to date had brought him more acclaim" than *Rebecca.*

These four years began when Selznick leased Hitchcock out, on very favorable terms (Selznick drove a hard bargain), to Wanger to make *Foreign Correspondent* (1940) and to RKO to make *Suspicion* (1941). These confirmed Hitchcock's reputation as "a slow and expensive director," and appeared, *pari passu,* to let Selznick off the hook for the well-publicized difficulties *Rebecca* had encountered on the set. (*Foreign Correspondent* cost half as much again as the more sumptuous *Rebecca*). What salvaged Hitchcock's reputation as a director who could deliver on time and within budget was neither *Suspicion* nor the "routine studio assignment" of *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (RKO, 1941) It was Pearl Harbor which added urgency to the completion of *Saboteur* (Universal, 1942); Hiroshima was to have a similar effect on *Notorious* (RKO, 1946). In the meantime, *Shadow of a Doubt* (Universal, 1943) pleased Hitchcock, and irked Selznick (whose asking price for Hitchcock had reached $1000 a pound) for the same reason; like *Notorious* later, *Shadow* demonstrated that Hitchcock, given a free hand, could keep a triumphant personal project under control. ("Can" does not imply "will," however, as philosophers remind us; an exasperated Darryl Zanuck almost cancelled the production of *Lifeboat* in 1944.) Hitchcock's four-year period of independence from Selznick had mixed results, but whetted his appetite for more—at which point Selznick reminded him of the terms of his contract and pulled him back within his clammy embrace.

Selznick by now had to acknowledge "that Hitchcock could capably produce films, . . . negotiate with the Production Code Administration, formulate budgets and shooting schedules, and cut film." To give Hitchcock his due would, however, have left no place for Selznick himself, and this was inconceivable. Selznick's solution to the dilemma was characteristic enough: for *Spellbound* (1945) and *The Paradine Case* (1947) "he delegated certain [of the] responsibilities [Hitchcock had requested] to Hitchcock, then shadowed him." (Shadow of a doubt, indeed.) The result was confusion worse confounded. If Hitchcock worked efficiently, as he did on *Spellbound,* this only made matters worse. Anything that redounded to Hitchcock's credit was seen by Selznick as a slap at him. But by now there was no way of making matters any better, as *The Paradine Case* in its way attests. The rules had changed. Selznick now wanted Hitchcock more than Hitchcock wanted Selznick.

Hitchcock wanted out. What rankled was that while Selznick had to sell *Notorious* (and lease Hitchcock) to RKO—Hitchcock "had the Indian sign" on him largely because *Duel in the Sun,* a feature for Selznick's *inamorata,* Jennifer Jones, was eating away at studio overhead —*Notorious* earned Selznick and RKO a cool million dollars apiece, while Hitchcock earned his salary. At another level, Hitchcock had reason to believe that he had earned his spurs as well as his salary in Hollywood, where independents like Stevens, Capra and Hawks were routinely able to edit and control the post-production of their films. Hitchcock had been able to do this, but only with *Shadow of a Doubt* and *Notorious* (*Foreign Correspondent* was less of a success).

Yet even if these two were among Hitchcock's very best films to date, the evidence was not yet *all* in. As Leff judiciously points out, after the ill-starred *Paradine Case,* "Hitchcock would face a more powerful opponent than [Selznick]: the force of aestheticism, . . . the obsession with craft—lenses and cranes, dolly-shots and break-apart scenery, Technicolor temperatures and hydraulically manipulated flats. . . . The

experiments in the [Sidney] Bernstein pictures [*Rope, Under Capricorn*] would trumpet the [hard-won] independence of Alfred Hitchcock. ["Both Bernstein and Hitchcock revered Hitchcock."] Yet [these "device pictures"] would also threaten to ruin him." There is a Greek muse whose job it is to satisfy one's fantasies *too* literally. "Bernstein's carte blanche would prove more detrimental than Selznick's interference had ever been." In the event, it would take neither *Stage Fright* nor *I Confess* nor yet *Dial "M" for Murder* to rescue and re-launch Hitchcock. These were no stronger as "properties" than *Rope* and *Under Capricorn* had been. It would take *Strangers on a Train* and *Rear Window.*

Leff's conclusions are measured, judicious, and sparing. He has too much respect for the reader to hit him or her over the head with didactic theses. But in drawing our own conclusions from the materials Leff has uncovered and laid out for us, it is hard to disagree with his judgment that "Hitchcock did not succeed *despite* Selznick any more than Selznick succeeded *because* of Hitchcock." Troubled and paradoxical though their strange partnership may have been, "the dynamics of the relationship served both men, not only as artists, but—of equal importance to them—as Hollywood professionals."

Leff's book is a gem. No Hitchcock bookshelf is complete without it, not least because Leff is canny enough—and knowledgeable enough, not just about film as an industry but also about film as what it is, a collective enterprise—not to buy into the Hitchcock mystique of complete authorial control, a mystique Hitchcock himself constructed, and used to bamboozle us all. Leff has knocked another nail into the coffin of *auteur* theory, and has produced a delightfully readable book at the same time. —PAUL THOMAS

MONTAGE EISENSTEIN

By Jacques Aumont, tr. by Lee Hildreth, Constance Penley, and Andrew Ross. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. $39.50 cloth, $12.95 paper.

In 1964 Christian Metz dismissingly compared the analytical passion of Sergei Eisenstein's theoretical work to erector sets and powdered milk. The authority of Eisenstein's theory of montage had been in eclipse in France since the advent of André Bazin's aesthetic of non-manipulation and cinema's abnegation before a reality luminous with an ambiguous meaning rather than constructed significance. Ironically, it was Metz's concerns with cinema as a form of discourse that in the 1970s opened the way to a French rediscovery of both the films and the theoretical works of Eisenstein. Jacques Aumont's *Montage Eisenstein* (originally published in 1979) is the culmination of this decade of encounter between Eisenstein's theories of cinematic discourse and the evolving theory of film and its spectator in France.

But the importance of the American publication of this work goes beyond its role in redressing the French view of Eisenstein. This is the first major study that focuses upon Eisenstein as a theorist. And it could not appear in this country at a better time, just as the English-speaking world is being introduced to the complete range of Eisenstein's published writings. The value of Aumont's work lies not only in his own insight as a reader of Eisenstein, but in the fact that he has thoroughly absorbed the material included in the *Collected Works* of Eisenstein, issued in six volumes by Moscow at the end of the sixties. Through the heroic effort of the late Jay Leyda the United States had been the site of Eisenstein's first published book (*The Film Sense* in 1942, followed by the selection of theoretical essays *Film Form* in 1949). But for nearly two decades now the *Collected Works* has gone without an English translation.

Lagging behind editions in German, Italian, and French (for which Aumont was general editor and translator of several volumes), the first volume of the new English translation edited by Richard Taylor has just appeared. This is supplemented by Eisenstein's key late work *Non-Indifferent Nature* translated by Herbert Marshall as well as Marshall's often distressingly

SCRIPTS

In the Summer book roundup, we mentioned a number of script volumes; published by university presses, these include introductions and often assorted critical responses, etc. "Raw," unaccompanied scripts are also available by mail order from a new company, Script City, 1765 North Highland Avenue, #760FQ, Hollywood, CA 90028. These are xeroxes of studio scripts, and cost from $16.95 to $24.95. A catalog is available for $2.00, listing several hundred titles, and a "film analysis series" of scripts come with discussions of plot structure and characterization that may be useful to screenwriters.

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abridged (at least compared to Aumont's French edition) translation of the autobiographical *Immortal Memoirs*. This mass of new material not only supplies vital understanding of Eisenstein; it enlarges our horizons in the ongoing theoretical investigation of film form. But it is also difficult material, filled with recherché digressions and labyrinthine speculation. Much of it Eisenstein never brought to a final draft. Through this thicket, Aumont is an invaluable guide. He has constructed a synoptic view of Eisenstein's thought which, while subject to discussion and even controversy, will stand as a reference point for all subsequent Eisenstein studies.

Aumont's translators have, for the most part, done him good service. His style is somewhat convoluted, but rarely obscure, and the translation reads smoothly if not simply. However, without undertaking an exhaustive comparison with the French text, I have encountered a number of minor errors, one of which could have unfortunate consequences. In this translation the table of shots which accompanies Aumont's shot-by-shot analysis of the dream sequence from *The General Line* indicates that the number given under "Duration" refers to seconds, when, in fact, it refers to frames. Therefore shots actually lasting some 18 seconds, for example, are incorrectly indicated as lasting nearly five(!) minutes. The book is also rather haphazardly coordinated with English sources (undoubtedly partly because the English edition of the *Selected Works* was only in planning stages when the book was prepared for publication). The most serious problem this causes is the translation of the term "harmonic montage." I am neither enough of a musicologist or Slavicist to argue the translation, but a footnote at least is merited to relate the term to English sources.

Aumont's reading of Eisenstein as a theorist draws on both written and filmic texts. From this reading he wishes to produce (or investigate the possibiliy of producing) an outline of the Eisensteinian system. He announces his intention to stay within Eisenstein's texts, describing their basic recurring concepts, rather than placing them within the larger context of film theory through comparison with other theorists. Nor does he attempt an evaluation of Eisenstein's theory through reference to other discourses, such as linguistics, psychoanalysis, or even those Eisenstein himself invokes, such as Marxism-Leninism. Aumont does indicate at points Eisenstein's relation to these other discourses, but he does not attempt (for the most part) to measure Eisenstein against some authoritative discourse outside his works. Description based on careful reading must, Aumont declares, precede evaluation.

This deceptively modest task of description is formidable. Eisenstein's writings are, from a conventional viewpoint, rarely systematic, and were subject to considerable evolution during the more than two decades in which he wrote. Does a single Eisensteinian theory exist, or are there several? Although extremely sensitive to the changes that Eisenstein's thinking underwent (and aware of the "external" forces of cultural politics which shaped aspects of these changes), Aumont defines a number of consistent themes and concepts within the Eisenstein corpus. While he details the metamorphosis of these concepts, Aumont does not feel that the earlier and later writings of Eisenstein represent antithetical systems.

The mixture of synchronic and diachronic readings of Eisenstein that Aumont delivers is sometimes hard to sort out. However, he makes a useful distinction between the concepts by which Eisenstein attempts to ground his theories in a scientific authoritative discourse, and those concepts which describe the methods of film discourse. The development between the two can be quite uneven. Over the decades Eisenstein's attempts at justifying the various forms of montage moved from reflexology through theories of prelogical thought, to speculation about the organic laws of nature. I believe this succession of anchoring discourses shows a discontinuity that only apparently reproduces itself in his theories of filmic construction. Aumont shows that the evolution of filmic concepts, while considerable, frequently represent a "reinvestment" of essential aspects under new terms. An apparently abandoned early term like "attractions" not only literally resurfaces in later works but can be discerned within the later descriptions of the effects of pathos and ecstasy.

The section that Aumont titles "Eisensteinian Concepts" forms (along with the brilliant application of these concepts to two specific sequences from *The General Line* and *Ivan the Terrible*) the center of this work. Here Aumont presents an overview of clusters of concepts that constitute the framework of his treatment of

Eisenstein as theorist, such as Frame/Fragment/Conflict, Attraction/Stimulus/Influence, or Pathos/Ecstasy/Organicism. Two themes that are introduced in this chapter (and that thread themselves throughout the book) constitute to my mind the recurrent element in Eisenstein's thought as described by Aumont. These are montage as a construction based on fragmentation and the idea of the "efficacy" of film.

In later Eisenstein the image (or "global image" as Aumont translates *obraz,* to indicate its totalizing role in structuring a work) played an essential role in his redefinition of montage. The *obraz* unifies a film by producing a central image through which the spectator understands the intent of the film. This global image operates as the sum of images—not a single specific image, but a generalization created by the spectator as she processes the film. Even in the earlier period of Eisenstein's work, in which conflict is stressed over unity, a construction derived from fragments defines the task of montage. It is through the interrelation of fragments (which for Eisenstein could mean both individual shots and—particularly in his later work—elements within shots) that the film-maker creates something different from an unmediated reality. This construction through fragmentation operates not only through cutting between shots, but also in how the compositional framing "cuts" the individual shot out from a surrounding reality. And within this frame a host of stimuli interact to form another level of construction. Eisenstein's theory consistently viewed this interaction of elements within the shot as a sort of montage—from his theory of conflict within the frame in the late twenties to his understanding of audio-visual correspondences in the thirties and forties.

Therefore montage for Eisenstein refers to a construction of fragments on a number of levels (from the "macro-montage" that determines relations between narrative episodes in a script to the "micro-montage" that rules relations between elements within shots). It is this construction through fragmentation that forms the recurring method of Eisenstein's work, and that underlies his assertion that far from abandoning montage, *Ivan the Terrible* grew completely out of *Potemkin.* While the nearly physiological impact of montage is obvious to the spectator in the collision of shots in *Potemkin,* Aumont's analysis of *Ivan* reveals all elements—visual and sonoral—interacting with and against each other to create a polyphonal montage of unexpected complexity.

This method of aesthetic construction derives from a dynamic process of transforming labor. As Aumont says towards the end of his book, Eisenstein views the film as the trace of a work of production by the film-maker which generates in the spectator a new labor in the production of meaning. In all periods of Eisenstein's work, film form is determined by its efficacy. For Aumont, efficacy indicates the ability the film has to influence its spectator. Eisenstein never approached the question of film form without thematizing it in relation to the spectator. From the shock assault of the montage of attractions (designed to "plough the psyche of the spectator"), to the devices of pathos (switching from assault to captivation, as Aumont puts it) through to the final theoreticalization of pathos as ecstasy (viewed as the raising of the spectator's emotional and intellectual activity to a maximum), Eisenstein explored a variety of theories of film efficacy. But within this variety he never swerved from his attempt to transform audiences through his films.

Film-making as a construction—a montage—of fragments reflects Eisenstein's belief that a spectator must participate in the same meaning producing process as the film-maker. Film-viewing becomes an active process in response to a construction which proceeds by recurring leaps rather than a continuous flow. If the later Eisenstein stressed the aesthetic virtue of unity, unity was nevertheless the product of the leaps into new qualities that Eisenstein saw as the essence of the dialectic and the secret of film form. The unity of a film was achieved by the spectator who retraced the process of the film-maker. It was therefore the film-maker's art to create a work whose fragmentation solicited the spectator's involvement in completing it. In that involvement lay its efficacy, its ability to transform the audience.

It is here, of course that Eisenstein's theory encounters the various discourses in which he wished to found his practice, from reflexology to the organic laws of nature. Eisenstein felt that these discourses with their claim to the status of scientific laws could guarantee the efficacy of his film form through a process of correspondence. And it is here that his theory becomes most problematic, most discontinuous over time, and least accessible to an evaluation

by a treatment which stays within the bounds of Eisenstein's work. Although Aumont offers some critique of these notions and an excellent survey of their development one out of the other, it is beyond the scope of his work to reach conclusions. However, one does feel somewhat dissatisfied with his closing characterization of Eisenstein's theory as partial, unfinished, and dated, an apparent dismissal which the rest of his text does not seem to demonstrate, or even believe.

The theoretical work in France during the seventies was, of course, grounded in a somewhat uneasy synthesis of the authoritative discourses of dialectical materialism, semiotics, and Lacanian psychoanalysis. The assumptions of those disciplines are often at odds with Eisenstein's. Aumont clearly feels uncomfortable with this incongruence but is unwilling to dismiss Eisenstein's insights for this reason, and so stays away from such a confrontation (except parenthetically). As the authority of this grounding discourse for film theory now shows some signs of giving way, I believe that we can be cued by Eisenstein's interest in efficacy to approach his theory from a different angle.

Eisenstein's constant concern with the audience defines his theory as less a poetics of film than a rhetoric. Eisenstein points the way for a fruitful return to the original purposes of the "art of persuasion." Beyond the "restrained rhetoric" of contemporary rhetoricians content to investigate the various figures of speech, Eisenstein re-established the meaning of the film trope as its power over an audience. From intellectual montage's agenda to teach the spectator to think dialectically, to the methods of arousing emotions through pathos and the techniques of ecstasy, Eisenstein proposed a method for the transformation of the spectator through both emotion and reason. The implications of this film rhetoric, far from being dated, are only now being digested. Eisenstein has left us a multi-course meal. And Aumont supplies us with the most useful of menus.

—TOM GUNNING

BERTOLUCCI BY BERTOLUCCI

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The bulk of these conversations with Bertolucci were conducted by Enzo Ungari in the early 1980s and were brought out by Ubulibri in Milan under the ambiguous title *Scene madri.* Near the end of the Italian text Ungari suggests to Bertolucci that all his best moments can be read as "scene madri," with the inevitable play on "key scene" and "maternal scene." Surely no director in the history of cinema has been more willing than Bertolucci to propose his work to his critics as an allegory of psychoanalysis, so he expansively allows that the pro-filmic event is for him the restaging of a primal scene within which he plays the dual role of helpless onlooker (the child with no control over the outcome of the scene) and masterful articulator (the director who organizes the tableau and controls the apparatus of reproduction). He acknowledges to Don Ranvaud, in the later conversations which take place around the filming of *The Last Emperor,* that the two projects following *Novecento* (*Luna* and *Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man*) were frustrating and insufficiently challenging; but he reads the experience of those years (1980–84) as a feminization, a "passivity" which put him in touch with something he understands as connected to "the maternal." Psychoanalysis may in practice be more of an enabling metaphor for Bertolucci than a set of material constraints: thinking about his place within the scene of representation never leaves him at a loss, or outside the practice of articulation. But there are some telling moments of identification in the Italian interviews with a death figured as feminine, made at a point in his international career when he must have felt rather helpless, when the grand designs of his *Red Harvest* and *1934* projects had fallen through. He speaks to Ungari about his birthplace Parma ("the small capital of 'autrefois' ") which has begun "to lose its identity," and of the light of the Italian provinces ("corrupted forever"). And then he proposes, awkwardly and touchingly, that he and Ungari drink to two women who have just died—Gitt Magrini, Bertolucci's longtime costume designer, and Gloria Grahame—"the dear names of those who will never appear again." And on this note of loss the original book ends.

The last two interviews conducted by Ranvaud (after the death of Ungari) show the director on the verge of the spectacular triumph which had eluded him with *Novecento.* "Some films are destined to materialize the director's childhood fantasies of omnipotence," he had

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remarked earlier, thinking about the "interminable" process of making that mid-seventies epic (we are forced to think of Freud's "interminable" psychoanalytic process). In *The Last Emperor* Pu Yi moves through a similarly glorious and limited childhood, only to be faced with an historical moment for which he is ill-equipped. The innocent splendors of childhood are replaced by a vain and servile aspiration in Manchukuo and the inevitable ideological restructuring under Mao. Finally Pu Yi returns to the Forbidden City as a purified and comic gardener, who produces for the new child guarding the emperor's throne a metonymic cricket as "proof" of his identity, and vanishes. This movement of reconciliation with what the past has become occurs immediately after Pu Yi's vain attempt to intercede with the Red Guards who are vilifying Chen Pao Shen, Pu Yi's prison instructor, who had re-educated the former Emperor in prison ("an oriental kind of forced psychoanalysis," says Bertolucci, ever ready with the analogies) and who stands in a binarized relation to the young Emperor's English tutor, R. F. Johnstone. The circle is closed by a return to the site of former splendor, where false power had been exercised by eunuchs. Now the spectacle of a chastened figure within the space where that power had been deployed in his name, a space wholly limited and enclosed, enables us to recognize better the terms of that imperial power, and to accept its limitations. The allegory of the castrated director/emperor (a pun which Bertolucci makes on "re/gista") is completed, in such a way as to enable to work to continue.

Bertolucci's quarrels with various intellectual fathers have been self-consciously structured his work, from *La Commare secca* (1962) through *Novecento* (1975), and the intellectual space surrounding the work. Even his first "memory" of cinema, as recounted in these conversations, is filtered through a memory of his father who had founded "one of the first, if not *the* first, Italian cineclubs." Young Bernardo attends a screening of Vidor's *Hallelujah!* and notices a "naive" response by two peasants, a "blend of great faith and sense of wonder, shared by children and 'primitive' viewers." So this memory of a first visit to the cinema filters itself through a complex theatricality, and specifically through the scene in Godard's *Les Carabiniers* where Michel Ange's "naive" response to the screen is understood as the text's witty Brechtian strategy. Memory is rewritten by the insertion of strategic figures: "I wonder if it's really true: the fact of the matter is that the two peasants had become part and parcel of the show." In a space of representation organized by the intellectual father it is necessary to place these figures who represent an alternative, in this case a more "instinctual" response to cinema.

It seems always crucial for Bertolucci to strategize these alternatives, as mechanisms for escaping the forceful influence of some older man. On his first feature he felt impelled to shoot against the style of the script, which was written in imitation of Pasolini. Thus the shooting was a process of articulation and defense against a beloved object: "I was about to make my first film in the knowledge that I had to protect it from everything I had come to love and that, unchecked, could wreck it completely." This acting out of passion and repression occurs at every level of the textual process. It is thematized in the relations between fathers and sons in films like *The Spider's Stratagem* or *Novecento;* it is orchestrated within the *mise en scène;* and it is played out in various extradiegetic ways (all anecdotalized in these conversations) in Bertolucci's emotional and intellectual attachments to figures like Godard, Alberto Grimaldi ("my father-producer . . . a relationship which should have been couched in terms of padre padrone") and even the heads of the Italian Communist Party, who turned such a cold shoulder on *Novecento*. This latter rebuff must have hurt the film-maker most of all, since it forever closed off a practice of fantasy (the dutiful but soft-willed ideological son whose good intentions must be nourished by his stricter elders) which had been in play for him since at least *Before the Revolution* (1965).

In Italy during the 1970s psychoanalysis came to replace Marxism as the hallmark of commitment for all those seeking change in the wake of the left's collapse after '68 and during the period of repression following Bologna '75. Turning away from public politics, Bertolucci notes, "allowed me to explore fully, in the first person, the mechanisms and contradictions of the production process." He could also escape the theoretical legacy of the sixties, whose complex burdens resulted in the film he continues to hate, *Partner* (1968). Those years under the sign of Godard and the French were "the years of theory and sickness" (*malattia teorica,* perhaps

"theoretical disease"). Nowadays, says Bertolucci, "I would feel very close to that experienced in dreams"; here Ranvaud's translation slips a bit from the more pointed Italian "molto vicino a quello amniotico." Bathed in these fluids one produces a dream lost empire, one which it would have been fatal to inherit fully, where one can emerge into a state of happy dispossession, while still clinging to the mastery of cinema. The best photograph in the last section of the book shows the child who plays the Emperor sitting on Bertolucci's lap. The director wears his habitual view-finder around his neck and stares at the child; the child, fully absorbed, stares at his own view-finder, a gift from the director.

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points to the distances between all these *different orders* of things and posits an *unthinkable ground* that authorizes their existence. For Foucault, the menagerie's "monstrous quality" is "not the propinquity of the things listed, but the very site on which their propinquity would be possible." And he goes on to ask, "Where else could they be juxtaposed except in the nonplace of language? Yet, though language can spread them before us, it can do so only in an unthinkable space."

However, in the cinema—and particularly in Werner Herzog's cinema—the "non-place" and "unthinkable space" of language that ground such perverse propinquities are *visible.* Indeed, it is this tension between the non-place of language and the concrete place of things, between unthinkable space and visible space, between language and vision, between the sensible order of things and the sensible materiality of things, that nearly all the writers in this volume recognize and address as the informing problematic of Herzog's cinema. What they disagree about, however, is whether Herzog and his films are to be aligned with the ironic inquiries into the discrepancies between language and being of a Borges or, rather, with the impossible, crazed, romantic quests of many of his characters. While Herzog's films may make physically *visible* the paradoxical relations between language and being, it is not visibly clear that they *think* these relations from some metacritical position. Thus, the films (and the film-maker's self-consciously constructed "romantic" persona) mesmerize and exasperate because they are ultimately "undecidable."

It is precisely this "undecidability" that structures the volume—its eleven essays focusing not merely on readings of specific films, but also on obsessively recurrent questions which Herzog and his texts pose to both traditional and contemporary notions of authorship, to the relations between representation and the unrepresentable (i.e., the "transcendental" or "sublime"), and to the nature and function of irony. Corrigan introduces these questions in one of the best essays in the book, arguing that Herzog's self-representation (at once both "outside" and "inside" his texts) is a conscious and "parodic" challenge to auteurism and, at the same time, assessing the film-maker's attitude toward the relation of language and being (for Herzog, the cinema problematically seems both) as regressively ironic in that it can "never admit an articulation."

In the introduction, Corrigan also states that the essays which will follow comprise "quintessentially an effort to return Herzog to writing, history, and the aesthetic determinants that he and his characters sometimes seem to reduce to toys." They succeed, however, in varying degree. Seven are collected in a midsection blandly titled "Readings" which features a somewhat uneven but generally provocative set of discussions of particular films and Herzogian genres. Because of its singular brevity and particular focus, Amos Vogel's laudatory piece on *Fata Morgana* seems inappropriate to the collection. It is followed by William Van Wert's detailed appreciation of Herzog's "documentaries"—both their relation to his fiction films and their method of construction. Much more theoretical (and negative) is Gertrud Koch's essay on *Land of Silence and Darkness.* Arguing from Benjamin's discussions of "uniqueness" and "aura," Koch sees Herzog's privileging the "blind seer" as "neo-romantic regression"—his "quest for the unmediated" (also a "quest for the sacred") placing him "much more in the tradition of Heideggerian philosophy than in the radical aestheticism of modernity." Dana Benelli performs a useful comparison of *Signs of Life* and *Aguirre, Wrath of God* that illuminates aspects of Herzog's style: his particular use of landscape, "narratives of rebellious response"; and "the functions of the leitmotifs of motion, stasis, circles, and lines in structuring a narrational attitude . . ." In an excellent essay focusing primarily on *Every Man for Himself and God Against All: The Mystery of Kaspar Hauser,* Brigitte Peuker investigates how literature and writing heavily inform and contextualize Herzog's work—despite the latter's assertion that cinema is the "art of illiterates." Given the general absence or invisibility of women and the sublimation of sexuality in nearly all of Herzog's films (itself a subject for critical analysis), it is not surprising that Judith Mayne's comparison of the vampire texts of Stoker, Murnau, and Herzog is the only essay with a feminist bent; raising "questions of authorship, sexuality, and narrative voice," she examines Lucy's "tentative narrative authority" in the Herzog work yet suggests that Murnau's film is much more radical in its exploration of "the dualities of sexual and narrative identity." Closing this midsection is, perhaps, the book's most satisfying essay: Thomas Elsaesser's sophisticated

analysis of *Where the Green Ants Dream*. In a beautifully balanced semiological study of the relation between the documentary and fictional dimensions of Herzog's texts, Elsaesser deconstructs what is perceived as Herzog's "romanticism" to suggest that his obsession with the "impossible dream of immediacy and transparency" is more complex than naive, that the films insist there is a terrible price to be paid for "pure" vision, and that Herzog ultimately functions as "a semiologist almost in spite of himself."

Framing this midsection of readings are two explicitly contentious sections that provocatively shape our attitude toward what comes between them. The first entitled "Promotion as Self-portrait" isolates Jan-Christopher Horak's "W. H. or the mysteries of walking in ice," both an overview of Herzog's relation to German film history and Lotte Eisner and an extremely negative reading of the film-maker's mysticism, antirationalism, and "extreme indiidualism, which can be aligned to reactionary politics." The last substantive section (a Filmography and Selected Bibliography follow) is called "Arguments" and juxtaposes two lengthy essays on *Heart of Glass*. Eric Rentschler offers us an extremely negative, Kracauerian reading of the film-maker's own Caligarism (i.e., hypnotizing the actors) and mystical preoccupations —and sees Herzog's aesthetic and political impulses as similar to those which gave us Leni Riefenstahl's cinema and National Socialism. Alan Singer "responds" to Rentschler with a more positive appraisal of Herzog as existentialist rather than idealist, his films more liberatory than reactionary. Drawing upon Kantian and Burkean notions of the "sublime," Singer sees Herzog's relation to sublimity and transcendence as existentially ironic and rational, the films' reflexivity a "tool of cultural critique." Herzog, he tells us, does not "preach a vision of utopian society," but rather finds satisfaction and responsibility "in the feat of representing the capabilities of representation." The "new image" in a Herzog film is always "the production of a text," dialectical and sublimely ironic in its capacity to yield "determinate knowledge of its own albeit indeterminate articulations." Closing the volume on these two highly persuasive and competing arguments, one yet has the feeling that Herzog and his films are located in neither, but rather (as Foucault might have it) in the "empty space, the interstitial blanks" between them. One still cannot "resolve" the perverse gaps which characterize the man and his work into a common ground.

It is worth noting—and seems no mere coincidence—that the problem of "undecidability" posed by Herzog is the same as that posed by "postmodern" representation. The nature of irony and its audience is a central issue in postmodern debates. So is a concern about the status of the image in relation to being (in cinema, the former is always already a simulacrum, perhaps "new" but never "original"). And so, too, is the desire for transcendence, for the euphoria that Fredric Jameson has called the "hysterical sublime." Indeed, perhaps it is the undecidability of postmodernism that has forged the "political unconscious" of this anthology, Herzog and his work standing paradigmatically (and paradoxically) *Between Mirage and History*—as *both* neoromantic, reactionary, regressive, premodern *and* ironic, liberatory, progressive, subversive, and postmodern. At any rate, it is interesting to speculate on why this study now. Neither we nor Herzog can escape the constraints of our historical moment.

—VIVIAN SOBCHACK

ROCKING AROUND THE CLOCK
Music Television, Postmodernism and Consumer Culture

By E. Ann Kaplan. New York & London: Methuen, 1987. $11.95 paper.

This book combines Kaplan's ongoing application of feminist criticism to film/television studies with a very interesting investigation of MTV within the context of postmodern culture. The book actually has several projects which Kaplan pulls together very neatly with a syncretic methodology. A main concern is the way by which television constructs the subject as spectator/voyeur and consumer. Here the theories of Jacques Lacan are used to describe the culture industry's fostering of an ego ideal for the spectator which encourages narcissism, inversion, and gender stereotyping. Kaplan combines Lacan with Louis Althusser for the latter's notion of the Ideological State Apparatus, the element of the superstructure (in this case television) which nurtures and supports biases and presuppositions of the dominant ideology.

Kaplan's larger concern is a typological approach to MTV in particular and rock video in

analysis of *Where the Green Ants Dream*. In a beautifully balanced semiological study of the relation between the documentary and fictional dimensions of Herzog's texts, Elsaesser deconstructs what is perceived as Herzog's "romanticism" to suggest that his obsession with the "impossible dream of immediacy and transparency" is more complex than naive, that the films insist there is a terrible price to be paid for "pure" vision, and that Herzog ultimately functions as "a semiologist almost in spite of himself."

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A weakness to Kaplan's study is an insufficient grasp of rock and roll as an art form, particularly in its relationship to American political/social change. At one point she states "Billy Haley [sic] and Elvis Presley are central to everyone's story as setting the stage for all that happens subsequently, while not being seen themselves as great artists." I doubt if most fans and rock critics would see Bill Haley and Elvis as equals among the founding fathers, and as many people would take issue with generalizations concerning their artistry. Kaplan's tendency to periodize rock culture (in the manner of many rock critics) runs against the approach she derives from recent Marxist criticism. Elvis, for example, represents rock's co-optation and commodification at its founding moment. John Lennon's departure from the Beatles (according to his several mammoth interviews) was based in part on the impossibility of a progressive form existing within the culture industry. Rock music was "always already" circumscribed by the field of the spectacle. These points do not make any less forceful and interesting Kaplan's arguments, particularly since the alienating environment of the mediascape and the enervated nature of current rock culture indeed present us with a new situation.

Particularly useful to this book is its glossary of psychoanalytic and Marxist terminology, important to the lay reader approaching the book primarily out of interest in MTV. Amid a growing bibliography on rock music, Kaplan's is one of the few rigorous, sustained studies treating rock as a serious form confronting the demands of a new political, economic, and technological era. —CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT

AMERICAN MEDIA AND MASS CULTURE
Left Perspectives

Don Lazere, ed. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1987. $48.00 cloth, $15.95 paper.

On subjects from Superman to rock 'n' roll, from Donald Duck to the TV news, from soap operas and romance novels to the use of doublespeak in advertising, this collection of essays offers students of contemporary media a comprehensive counterstatement to the conservatism that has been ascendant since the seventies in American politics and cultural criticism. Included are nearly 40 selections by prominent Marxist, feminist, and other leftist critics of American mass culture—from a dozen academic disciplines and fields of media activism.
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Sayles began with *Return of the Secaucus Seven,* shot with his own $65,000, and has continued through *Lianna, Baby It's You, The Brother from Another Planet,* and *Matewan,* always preserving his independence in the fundamentals: he controls the script, the casting, the shooting, and when he talks about final cut it *is* final cut.

Sayles is also, of course, a writer, of two novels as well as many scripts (for others as well as the ones he has himself directed). The straightforward clarity of his mind is everywhere apparent in this meticulous record of the production of *Matewan,* which is also a quintessential independent film—devoted to a serious political subject, cast with relative unknowns and well performed, beautifully shot and edited, and probably doomed to obscurity in the American market, though it may find a permanent niche in video form. Sayles's account of the production process comprises about half the book, and the shooting script the rest. The result, thus, is an impressively detailed case study which should be extremely useful to anybody trying to make movies outside the Hollywood machinery. —E. C.

THE MISSION

By Daniel Berrigan. New York: Harper & Row, 1986. $14.95.

Anyone familiar with leftist politics, contemplative literature, or American poetry will immediately recognize the name Daniel Berrigan, author of some 40 books of philosophy, biblical commentary, and poetry. Born in 1921, Berrigan was ordained as a Jesuit priest in 1952. During the Vietnam War, besides leading and participating in many demonstrations, he was involved in the burning of draft records; after the near-disaster at Three Mile Island, he worked toward effecting nuclear disarmament. He has lived in the underground resisting arrest; he has served time in federal penitentiaries and local jails. And through it all, he remains an ordained Jesuit. As often as Berrigan has been at odds with the Church, his respect for individuals within the Church remains untarnished.

Who, then, could have better served as an advisor on Jesuit life when Roland Joffe was filming *The Mission*? Joffe knew that the two priests who play major roles in his film were inventions, symbols of the many Jesuits who took similar stands, but who might or might not have died along with the Indians. What he needed in an "advisor" was someone who would be willing to take parallel creative liberties with the strict letter of Jesuit history.

Berrigan does not ignore the incongruities within the film: "Would the Jesuits, jealous of the honor of 'Ours,' have admitted to their ranks a confessed murderer and slave trader?" he asks as he views the character of Mendoza. He then continues, searching within himself, through his own knowledge of what it means to live as a Jesuit, and comes up with justifications for Joffe's choices: "Mendoza reminds one of a certain Spanish hidalgo of a slightly earlier period. This prototype, whose rake's progress included at the least sexual adventurism and military bloodletting, is known to history as Ignatius Loyola. He went on to found the Jesuits. And to be acclaimed in the church as saint and mystic." (17)

One of the elements Berrigan brings to this book, a rarity among the books normally reviewed in these pages, is an absolute naivity as to film and its process. This can be refreshing, because he dares to ask the same questions viewers often ask. Why the clichéd "bedroom scene?" he asks. Isn't there a way to show brother turning against brother, besides having one in love with the other's wife? And he is told that yes, there are other ways, but those "are not so easy to show quickly on the screen."

If the film were to continue in this manner, Berrigan knows his time would be better spent helping refugees in Central America, as he did the year before. But there are other moments where he sees his words being taken to heart, particularly as they plan the film's ending. He can remark that "the task we set ourselves in the film is, rightly understood, all but beyond rational powers," and then a moment later realize that the Jesuits these men are portraying attempted similar miracles: "The actors (men all) are attempting something audacious, miming the incandescent spirits of Jesuits who blazed a path through the eighteenth-century jungle of ignorance, lust, and avarice, and who created so splendid a utopia, on behalf of others, that one still gasps for wonderment."

And is he himself any less audacious? It is not sheer coincidence that Berrigan is also an extra in the movie, portraying one of the Jesuit priests. Needless to say, he could easily be forced into a caricature of himself, but does not let this happen. As the film progresses the other

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actors become restless, anxious to take chances themselves instead of relying upon stunt men, but Berrigan resists. "I felt, moreover, in a sufficiently clear way that I wasn't born to perish for the greater glory of filmdom," he says—and it hardly need be remarked upon, if the reader has gotten this far, that there are many causes for which this man *would* be willing to perish.

At the start of the book, Berrigan refers to this as "our" film, but one senses the tension behind such a statement. The "film" and the "priest" are often at odds, especially since *The Mission* has a $20-million budget, a fact Berrigan finds it hard to forget as he looks at the barrio surrounding them. But gradually he becomes more committed to the filming, and the association becomes more natural to him. By the time we've reached page 100, Berrigan, in conversation with Jeremy Irons, speaks of "we, the Jesuits."

His first day on the set, Berrigan established a bond with Irons (who plays the role of Father Gabriel). The friendship between Berrigan and Robert De Niro (Mendoza) was more difficult to achieve, in part due to De Niro's Hollywood status and innate shyness. But it is these difficulties, the doubts Berrigan expresses about human nature in general and people in particular, which continually remind readers of his own human limitations.

Berrigan remains determined to make this film more than a simple retelling (or rewriting) of history. Unfortunately, not many people in the Church (let alone the world) today share these views. A British priest, apparently also an advisor to the film, rants because the script not only ordains a Guarani Indian into the Jesuit order, but places him at the head of a large mission. While his colleague protests, Berrigan's essential world-view comes through clearly: "I tend to look on the episode as a species of sign of a better and different future now present and accounted for, for it is also a fact that in our century, all sorts and hues of 'indigenous people' have been received in the Order and are presently exercising considerable authority in our midst." (81)

We surmise from Berrigan's musings that Joffe shares many of these views. But had Joffe attempted to convey these perceptions directly to viewers, the film would become mere documentary, with rhetorical overtones. Reading the journal of one man involved with the film, the insights become more personal than didactic. It is Berrigan's uncanny ability to relate every scene to his own political concerns, at home and abroad. And this is, moreover, the least one expects from such a man.

—ROCHELLE RATNER

[The following group of annotations had to be held over from the Summer issue book round-up]

Miscellaneous

Bates, Brian. *The Way of the Actor.* Boston: Shambhala, 1987. $15.95. Bates subscribes to what might be called the Shirley MacLaine theory of performance. His subject is acting, but he is deeply interested in parapsychology, Jungian mysticism, and self-help. From interviews with stars, he derives a "path to personal knowledge and power." He argues that actors are "shamans" with abilities "as yet unfathomed by science." He believes we can all use similar abilities to release our "inner potential," but he never tells us how. —JAMES NAREMORE

Blonski, Annette, et al., eds. *Don't Shoot Darling!: Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia.* Greenhouse Publications, 385 Bridge Road, Richmond 3121, Australia. A lively collection of documents and reflections by women active in the Australian film scene over the years. Gradually there has been a shift from feminist documentaries and "agitprop" toward experimental non-fiction and narrative fiction. Meanwhile the film industry as a whole has become increasingly centralized. The volume shows Australian women film-makers and other film people doing a wide variety of work, both practical and theoretical, and offers interesting cross-national perspectives on feminist ideas and enterprises. —E. C.

Carlisle, Anne. *Liquid Sky.* New York: Doubleday, 1987. $8.95. Novelization of the film: junk, sex, UFO murders.

Chell, David. *Moviemakers at Work.* Redmond, WA: Microsoft Press, 1987. $14.95 paperback. Chell is a good interviewer, and the book takes you through the entire range of film-making personnel, from cinematography through editing, sound, production and costume design, make-up, special effects. In many cases the interviews are a good substitute for hanging around a shoot; they give the reader a concrete feel for the production process. Should be excellent for classroom use. —E. C.

Flashner, Graham. *Fun with Woody: The Complete Woody Allen Quiz Book.* New York: Holt, 1987. $8.95 paper.

Gabbard, Krin, and Glen O. Gabbard. *Psychiatry and the Cinema.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. $24.95. The collaborative effort of a

actors become restless, anxious to take chances themselves instead of relying upon stunt men, but Berrigan resists. "I felt, moreover, in a sufficiently clear way that I wasn't born to perish for the greater glory of filmdom," he says—and it hardly need be remarked upon, if the reader has gotten this far, that there are many causes for which this man *would* be willing to perish.

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Gabbard, Krin, and Glen O. Gabbard. *Psychiatry and the Cinema.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. $24.95. The collaborative effort of a

literary scholar and psychoanalyst, this book traces the motif of the psychiatrist in 250 American films from *Dr. Dippy's Sanitarium* to *Psycho III,* with many photographs. —E. D.

Giannetti, Louis. *Understanding Movies,* 4th ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1987. Adds a new chapter analyzing *Kane.*

Hadleigh, Boze. *Conversations with my Elders.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987. $14.95. These are not ordinary interviews; Hadleigh approached his gay or bisexual subjects (Mineo, Visconti, Beaton, Cukor, Fassbinder, and Hudson) to talk directly and sometimes confrontationally about what their sexual orientation had meant in their careers. He isn't very well informed about their films, with some exceptions, but he's a smart, resourceful, and daring conversationalist. —E. C.

Hauge, Ron. *The Colorization Movie Coloring Book.* New York: Workman Publishing, 1987. $6.95 paper. With the crayons cleverly provided with the book, you too can become a colorizer. Decide whether Jimmy Cagney used a pink or yellow grapefruit! Get rid of those boring blacks in *Night of the Hunter!* Turn *La Grande Illusion* into something more commercially appealing, say along the lines of *Hogan's Heroes.* Make *The Grapes of Wrath* less depressing—add a little color! The atrocities you can commit are limited only by the fact that the book offers just 30 films to mutilate. —E. C.

King, Viki. *How to Write a Movie in 21 Days: The Inner Movie Method.* New York: Harper and Row, 1988. $7.95 paperback. A lot of this is free association about writing, but there's also some sound advice about script structure and a lot of ideas about psychological self-care for writers. A complement to more technique-oriented manuals. —E. C.

Loader, Jayne. *Between Pictures.* New York: Grove Press, 1987. $16.95. Okay, what's a former UCLA film-school type, co-maker of the satirical documentary *Atomic Cafe* (which once graced *FQ's* cover) and author of a tedious if perceptive analysis of *Jeanne Dielmann* (*Jump Cut,* then reprinted in *Movies & Methods* Vol. II) doing on her novel's own cover, squatting on a bare New York loft floor, grinning a trifle uneasily and showing her attractive knees over a pair of expensive endangered-species boots? Hyping another degenerate-Hollywood novel, that's what. It's an experiment in stream-of-coke-consciousness, told by a smart Southern broad turned expensive screenwriter who's also a nonstop party girl with a wicked mouth; her voice gives the novel a racy, nihilistic drive, as of honesty not quite too painful to bear. Loader is good at characters, canny about how surprisingly much can be stolen effectively from old movies, and seems to be utterly *au courant* with the drug and sex habits of the media industry. Personal and social desolation echo each other in the story, but Anna Kate the heroine is tough (and unbelievably lucky) and survives. Somebody calls her "Lulu," and sure enough it all feels reminiscent of Berlin just before Hitler. Lots of witty dialogue—too good to bring a fat movie contract? —E. C.

Jack Mathews. *The Battle of Brazil.* New York: Crown Publishers, 1987. $19.95. This book's in two movements: the first is a drum roll of diverting trivia, shamelessly padded; the second is the music—Tom Stoppard's inspired screenplay for *Brazil.* For 90 pages, Mathews describes the underside of the public squabble between director Terry Gilliam and MCA-Universal president Sidney Sheinberg. The two couldn't agree on length, title, aesthetics, audience, and most of all, the ending. Steinberg wanted Gilliam's final idyllic dream sequence to close the film; Gilliam prevailed with his darker vision and won an LA Film Critics Association award. To his credit, Mathews lambastes Hollywood's slavish reliance on premise testing and the executive assumption that *Brazil* was "an interminable sit-through for American audiences." To his debit, he never pries off the top of Gilliam's skull and peers inside, relying instead on examining a lukewarm controversy that soon becomes tiresome. However, Mathews is a decent annotator. Although *Brazil* is still packed with fantasy sequences, he describes more that had been cut before final release, some to the detriment of the film. He also loves to unearth arcane facts; for example, he finds out why Gilliam overloads his scenes with giddy detail—he had a childhood passion for *Mad* magazine, with its cluttered panels and anarchic humor. But sometimes brilliant visual devices come with a price. Witty minutiae like *Brazil's* slogans ("Suspicion breeds confidence") flood the viewer and compete with its dialogue. The enclosed screenplay, like a libretto for a florid Italian opera, provides a remedy, filling in the gaps after the music is over. —PETER BATES

McClelland, Doug. *Blackface to Blacklist: Al Jolson, Larry Parks, and "The Jolson Story."* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1987. $29.50. The making of the film and the ensuing debate about blackface; with a few remarks about the Hollywood-politics ramifications.

McClelland, Doug. *Star Speak: Hollywood on Everything.* Winchester, MA.: Faber and Faber, 1987. $14.95. Lots of wit, not much wisdom. —E. C.

McDonough, Tom. *Light Years: Confessions of a Cinematographer.* New York: Grove Press, 1987. $17.95. This is a stressed-out evocation of the world of movie-making crews, written by a cameraman. It's a "fictionalized" ethnographic fabric loosely thrown together from vignettes of the crazed movie-making life; it has no particular beginning, middle, or end. But that doesn't much matter—as the hero narrator says somewhere, this is postmodernism and meaning is arbitrary anyway. "Duke" goes to India on a documentary shoot and nearly dies. He works on commercial abominations, including a Miss Piggy shoot. He hangs out with Andean peasants. Always, because he has the eye-mind of a cameraman, he can't help *seeing* life—painfully, a victim of uncontrollable mental overexposure. McDonough gets off many penetrating and sometimes moving comments on his craft. Moreover, he's not just a technician; he's read Sontag and Barthes, and *Masters of Light,* and a couple of thousand movies have imprinted

themselves on his brain-emulsion. Bouncing around with him, as he discourses on cinematographers from Billy Bitzer two generations ago to the contemporary innovator Johanna Heer, will be a treat for any observant moviegoer. —E. C.

Meisner, Stanford and Dennis Longwell. *Stanford Meisner on Acting.* New York: Vintage, 1987. $8.95 paperback. Stanford Meisner was a founding member of the Group Theater, and became a highly influential teacher of acting. This book describes his classroom techniques, centering on a fifteen-week workshop at New York's Neighborhood Playhouse. Author Dennis Longwell verges on hagiography, but provides useful documentation. Like all proponents of the Method, Meisner values emotion over analysis or physical training. He often refers to the "private self," and seems to have moved very far from the social activism that animated his compatriots in the thirties. —JAMES NAREMORE

Miller, Lynn Fieldman. *The Hand that Holds the Camera: Interviews with Women Film and Video Directors.* New York: Garland, 1988. $27.00. Miller is a persistent and reflective interviewer, and she gets full and responsive interviews from most of her subjects (Doris Chase, Michelle Citron, Kavery Dutta, Tami Gold, Amalie Rothschild, Meg Switzable, and Linda Yellen). They represent a considerable variety of backgrounds, approaches, styles, and film-making roles, but all are concerned in some way with feminist or other social issues. The interviews convey in often depressing but sometimes inspiring fashion the tribulations that independent film-makers must confront and surmount. —E. C.

Munn, Michael. *The Hollywood Murder Casebook.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988. $15.95. Sordid cases recounted, but apparently without the benefit of any additional research (a bibliography is appended, starting with Kenneth Anger, but there are no notes). —E. C.

Packard, William. *The Art of Screenwriting: Story, Script, Markets.* New York: Paragon, 1987. $18.95 cloth; $8.95 paper. Modestly useful advice, but not an advance over existing manuals. —E. C.

Pagnol, Marcel. *Jean de Florette and Manon of the Springs: Two Novels.* Berkeley: North Point Press, 1988. $30.00. Those who have appreciated the revival of the wonderful old melodramatist through the Claude Berri films now have the chance to read the full texts, in a fine translation by W. E. van Heyningen. —E. C.

Robertson, Patrick. *The Guinness Book of Almost Everything You Didn't Need to Know about the Movies.* New York: Sterling, 1986. $7.95. A smorgasbord of trivia.

Russo, Vito. *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies.* rev. ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1987. $10.95 paper. Russo has added a lengthy survey of Hollywood and non-Hollywood films with gay material since his original edition in 1981, and finds few real improvements: homophobia still rules. A readable and informative study. —E. C.

Scheuer, Steven H., ed. *The Complete Guide to Videocassette Movies.* New York: Holt, 1987. $19.95 paper. Americans, says Scheuer, are spending five billion a year on rentals and purchases of videocassettes, creating in effect a new "medium" in its own right. This guide offers quite good critical commentaries, credits for basic casts and directors, and a four-star rating system; films are categorized by genre also. Some notes on video versions vs. film versions. Omits X-rated films; includes silent classics. —E. C.

Scott, Jay. *Midnight Matinees: Movies & Their Makers,* 1975–1985. New York: Ungar, 1987. $10.95 paper. Paperback reissue.

Sobchack, Thomas, and Vivian C. Sobchack. *An Introduction to Film,* 2nd ed. Boston: Little, Brown, 1987. Many recent films have been worked into the revision of this standard textbook.

Sterling, Anna Kate. *Celebrity Articles from the Screen Guild Magazine.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1987. $17.50.

Sarlot, Raymond, and Fred E. Basten. *Life at the Hollywood Marmont.* Roundtable Publishing, 933 Pico Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90405, 1987. $19.95. The restorers of the ancient apartment-hotel have collected innumerable anecdotes from its glorious, run-down, and reborn history, dropping names of

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famous guests and introducing the unsung staff members who made the institution what it most unpredictably was. —E. C.

Seger, Linda. *Making a Good Script Great*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1988. $15.95 cloth, $8.95 paper. Seger gives a good review of script construction processes, with examples drawn skillfully from a core group of familiar films, giving particular attention to the rewriting (and later editing) of *Witness*. While Seger does not contribute any terribly original ideas about writing and rewriting, her book is solidly thoughtful and free of the silliness and easy industry cynicism often found in scriptwriting guidebooks. —E. C.

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Eric Taub. *Gaffers, Grips and Best Boys.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987. $12.95. Have you ever wondered, as you were reading a film's closing credits, what a gaffer or a best boy is? Have you wondered enough to read a book about it? *Gaffers, Grips and Best Boys* describes film industry occupations. Stuntperson Conrad Palmisano tells us his work "is an ego-oriented business. It's hard to believe you're not superman." Gaffer Gary Holt says that he spends a lot of time running errands between the production office and the set. John Lithgow, who played the transsexual Roberta Muldoon in *The World According to Garp, didn't* show up for his audition dressed in wig and high heels. There are a few enlightening interviews, such as those with director John Carpenter and director of photography Haskell Wexler. Taub gets them to talk about their doubts and conflicts, rather than just nuts and bolts. But these are rare moments. The book desperately needs pictures and lively anecdotes. It also targets the wrong readers. It might have succeeded had it aimed at young people contemplating Hollywood careers. It could then have provided a list of contacts, sample wage scales, dos, don'ts, an appendix on unionization, etc. Perhaps it shouldn't be a book at all, but a prime-time TV special entitled "Behind the Scenes—Hollywood's Unsung Heroes." —PETER BATES

Vermilye, Jerry, ed. *500 Best British and Foreign Films to Buy, Rent or Videotape.* New York: Morrow, 1988. $24.50 cloth, $15.95 paper. The lucky 500 were selected by the National Board of Review and the editors of *Films in Review;* credits, synopsis, background comments, and videocassette source if any. No rating stars or asterisks, thank God, but festival awards are noted. —E. C.

BEST FRENCH FILM BOOKS 1987-88
by Paul R. Michaud

My selection of titles is more stringent than in years past, but also the enormous demand for film books that had existed in the past seems in 1987–88 to have considerably lessened. One victim of this trend is *Cahiers du Cinéma,* which has lost so many of its readers in the recent past that it has been running an annual deficit of 2 million francs ($350,000) and will have to find new capital or slow down its production of film books, if not shut down altogether. Luckily, other publishers of such books, for example Editions du Cerf, Hazan and OCIC, seem to be doing well enough to continue issuing such impressive tomes as, respectively, *Falconetti, Paris-Hollywood,* and *Préhistoire du Cinéma en Afrique.* In order to obtain copies of the books listed below, readers are advised to contact their closest university bookstore, for

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French publishers are often unable to fill individual orders.

Claude Autant-Lara, *Les Fourgons du malheur,* Carrère. Memoirs, once again, of the director of *Le Rouge et le Noir.*

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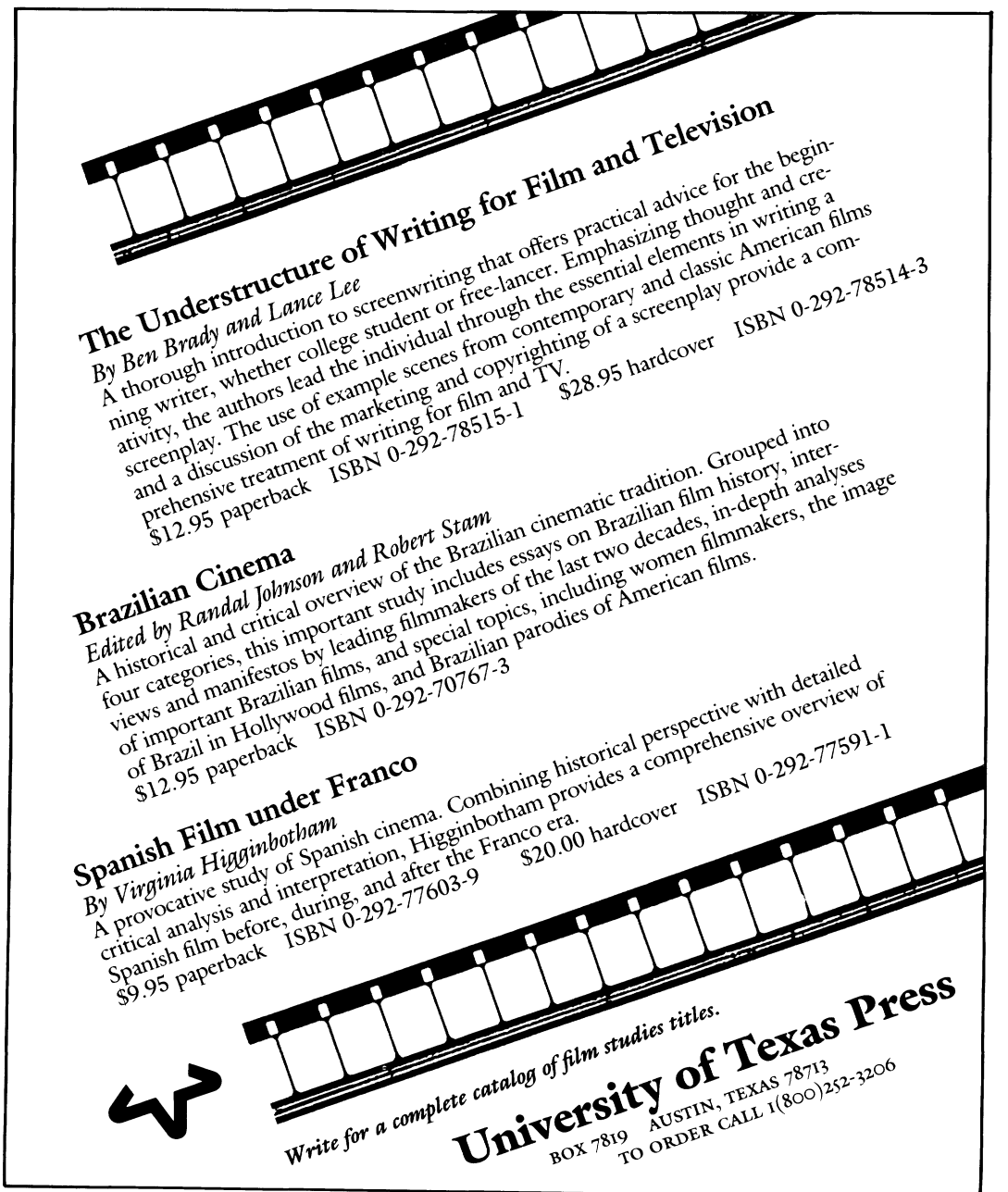

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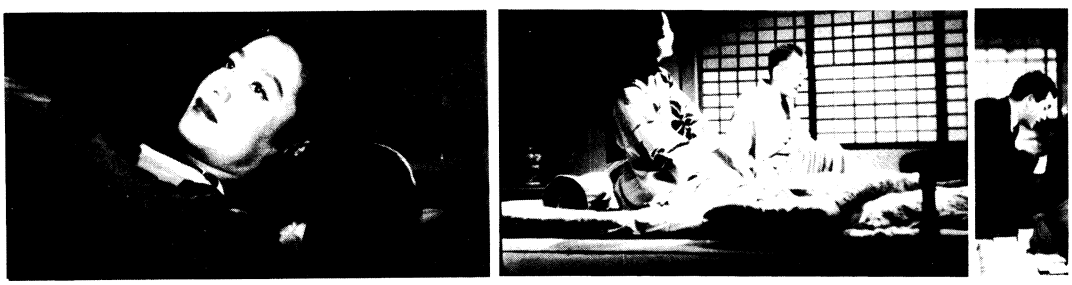

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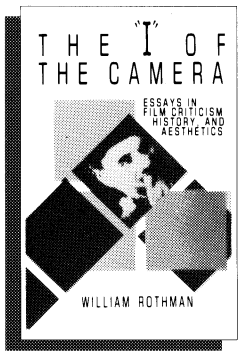

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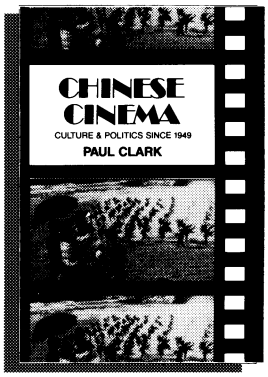

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